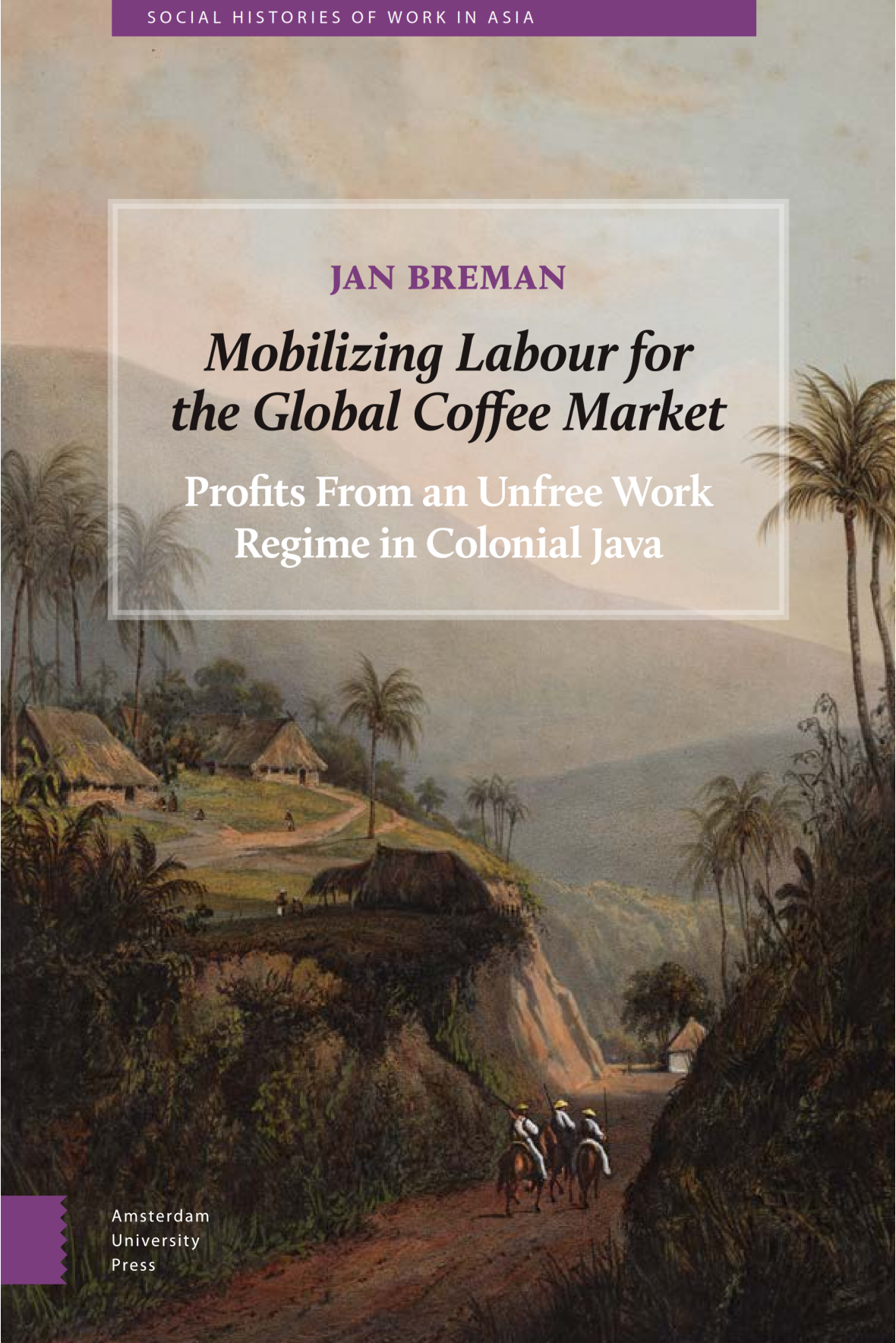
SOCIAL HISTORIES OF WORK IN ASIA

JAN BREMAN

Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market

Profits From an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java



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Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market

Social Histories of Work in Asia

For centuries Asian workers provided their own societies and the world with manufactures, spices, rice and many other items. Recruitment, organization and control of sufficient amounts of labour have been essential to keep the Asian economies and societies going. This series aims at looking into these dynamics in depth, acknowledging the wide-ranging variety of social trajectories including labour values and cultural connotations, ecological constraints and different degrees of market orientations. The series aims to be a meeting place between experts from a variety of disciplines; from linguistics to history and social sciences. The core ambition of the series is to explain different types of labour (share cropping, wage labour, slavery, casual or precarious labour) within a wider cultural, economic and ecological context. Topics such as guilds, circulation of labour, gender stratifications, religious and ethnic identities or modes of labour control are all relevant to this approach. Other topics may be balancing these more structural considerations by departing from the workers' perspectives and their actions: ranging from collective action and daily resistance to life cycles and their relationship to labour. Geographically the series will cover the space from East Asia to West Asia; from Japan to Egypt.

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'And there came strangers from the West, who made themselves lord and master of the land. They wished to reap the benefits of the fertility of the soil, and ordered the inhabitants to devote part of their labour and their time to fulfilling other tasks' – there used to be talk namely of rice, which the Javanese people needed to stay alive – 'other tasks, that would produce greater profits on markets in Europe. To persuade the common man to perform these tasks, nothing more was needed than the simplest of politics. He would always obey his Chiefs. It was therefore only necessary to win over the Chiefs by promising them a share of the profits ... and it was a complete success.'

Multatuli – *On free labour in the Dutch East Indies, and the current colonial agitation.* Amsterdam 1862: 38-39

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Prologue: The need for forced labour

The cultivation of coffee on Java for the world market started in the early years of the eighteenth century. This study examines colonialism and its impact on the social structure of the main coffee producing area in Southeast Asia. The advent of Dutch domination considerably contributed to the expansion of the world economy, a process of long duration. The *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC; Dutch East India Company) sought colonial commodities in various parts of the Indonesian archipelago. The coffee plant, imported from southern India, proved to thrive in the highlands surrounding the colonial headquarters in Batavia and the VOC's agents encouraged cultivation of this exogenous crop. At first, they bought the harvest from peasant growers, but what started as a regular commercial transaction soon evolved into the compulsory cultivation and delivery of coffee at a price far below the market value. Rising demand for this new consumer good in the Atlantic world led to pressure on the growers to supply more and more beans. This required the VOC to extend its control deep into the hinterland. In the Sundanese region of West Java known as the Priangan lands, the VOC did not achieve this by building up its own machinery of governance. It remained at a distance, installing indigenous chiefs and binding the peasantry in servitude to them. This system of indirect rule, imposed through regents and the lower ranks of the Sundanese aristocracy, kept management costs down. The same mode of cheap exploitation continued after the fall of the VOC and the emergence of the early-colonial state in a regime that lasted far into the nineteenth century.

The history of colonial rule on Java has focused mainly on the coastal areas and the lowlands and much less on the more inaccessible hilly and mountainous country in the deeper hinterland, far out of sight of Batavia. The sparse population living in tiny, scattered settlements and engaged in shifting cultivation gave these regions the characteristics of a frontier zone, a type of colonization which was strengthened by the arrival of newcomers from elsewhere who opened up the wilderness, either on their own initiative or at the behest of the gentry. Labour was a scarce commodity which the VOC and later the early-colonial state tried to appropriate it by imposing restrictions on the mobility of the peasants. Coffee growing was a lucrative business that relied on forced cultivation. The cooperation of the native aristocracy was indispensable in requisitioning both land and labour. Such total control of these factors

of production was given a veneer of justification with the erroneous argument that it simply represented a continuation of obligations that had been imposed on the population since time immemorial. Coffee cultivation played a major role in the regime of exploitation, yet it has received scant attention in colonial historiography.

This book aims to offer more than the past history of a neglected region, the Priangan highlands, of a system of indirect governance that had already been replaced in other parts of Java in the early nineteenth century by making the village community the cornerstone of colonial management. The cultivation of coffee for the expanding world market was based on unfree labour, a mode of employment that was first applied in the Priangan highlands and remained pivotal when it was made the organizing principle of what became known as the *cultuurstelsel* (cultivation system) in 1830. The aim of my study is to establish how labour and land were mobilized, why forced cultivation became the mode of surplus extraction and what impact this brutal system of taxation had on the economy and society.

My account is based on the study of a large quantity of records and secondary sources. I have read through a large number of archives deposited in both The Hague (National Archives) and Jakarta (Arsip Nasional) but only those I have referred to are included in the bibliography. The Dutch edition (2010) has more references and quotations but I did not want to overload this English edition with too many details of archives only accessible in Dutch. I was shown the way to these old sources, mostly handwritten, by existing compilations of archives, not least that of Frederik de Haan, who was given the assignment in 1900 to 'conduct a historical study of the development, impact and consequences of the system established by the VOC regarding the Priangan Regencies'. He continued his work after being appointed conservator of the colonial archives in 1905. De Haan did not restrict his task to that of archivist but – as his original assignment required – went a step further and, after many years of identifying, collecting and cataloguing his sources, published his research findings in eight parts (1910-12). His work, *De Preanger Regentschappen onder Nederlands bestuur tot 1811* (The Priangan Regencies under Dutch Rule until 1811), was presented in four volumes totalling around 2,500 pages. I refer to this study frequently, especially in the first half of this book. For the later chapters, I was able to draw on another compilation, *Bijdragen tot de kennis van het landelijk stelsel op Java* (Contributions to the History of the Land Rent System) by Salomon van Deventer. Van Deventer was an official in the colonial administration on Java when he was given the assignment,

while on leave in the Netherlands in 1863, to collect and catalogue official documents relating to the introduction of the land rent and cultivation system. The first volume of his study, published in 1865, described the origin of the system. Parts 2 and 3, which appeared a year later, examined the working of the system from 1819 to 1836 and after 1836, respectively. The last part is incomplete because the resignation of Minister for the Colonies Fransen van der Putte, a declared opponent of the cultivation system, prevented Van Deventer from finishing his work of documentation and the publication of his findings. In the final part of this study, I draw on a third source, *Algemeen Verslag der Uitkomsten van het Onderzoek betreffende de Koffijkultuur in Java* (Account of the investigations concerning coffee cultivation in Java), a report submitted in 1868 which was included in the parliamentary papers for 1870-71.

The abolition of the Priangan system in 1870 marked a turning point. Administrative reform led to native chiefs in the region being stripped of the power they had enjoyed until then, while the cultivation of coffee was organized along different lines. Government commissioner Otto van Rees reported in 1867 on the how and why of the change in governance. Until the end of colonial rule, only a small number of insiders who were interested in the history of coffee cultivation and how it was managed were granted access to his findings and recommendations, while they remained closed to the wider public. The report, which disappeared into the archives, is an important document because it offers insight into the debate pursued within a small circle of policy-makers. These deliberations addressed the streamlining of a regime founded on exploitation and oppression but which was presented to the outside world as something else, as introducing good governance and imposing an economic discipline that the peasantry was supposed to have sadly lacked.

The colonial policy pursued from the metropolis in Europe and its social impact on the native population has been a recurring topic of study. That also, and especially, applies to the *cultuurstelsel*. Its introduction by the early-colonial state was immediately accompanied by assessments for and against the system and that debate never flagged. No matter how different opinions are, they all acknowledge that the forced cultivation of crops for the world market found its rationale in the objective to generate the highest possible surplus, appropriated as profit by the metropolis. Much more disputed than the drain of wealth from the colonized economy is the question whether the heavy taxation on the native population improved their welfare – in other words whether it boosted not only growth but also development – or held the peasantry strangled in poverty, and thus

resulted in stagnation or even underdevelopment. In the Epilogue to this volume I position myself in this debate by rejecting the views of recent and reputed colonial historians who argue that the onerous system of forced cultivation, intentionally or unintentionally, also opened up new channels of progress for the peasantry. In contrast to these authors, I have highlighted in my findings the *faits et gestes* with which the Priangan producers, predominantly hailing from land-poor and landless underclasses, continued to resist for a century and a half the coercive coffee regime to which they were exposed. My conclusion is that their sustained unwillingness to act in compliance with what the colonial authorities ordered them to do was of decisive importance in the ultimate decline and fall of the cultivation system.

Before moving on to my account, I would like to take a few words to explain why this study, which spans a period of 40 years, has taken so long to complete. The first steps were taken shortly after the mid-1970s. The initiative had its origins in the Comparative Asian Studies Programme (CASP), a research unit set up within the Comparative Sociology Department at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Under a cooperation agreement with the Socio-Economic Department at Bogor Agricultural University in Indonesia, staff from Rotterdam were seconded to Bogor on long-term teaching assignments. Our shared research interest focused on the longitudinal study of change processes in rural Java. Under the agreement, the Rotterdam group would begin by documenting the historical sources available in archives and libraries on the Cimanuk River basin, which descends from the Priangan highlands to the coastal plain of Cirebon. It was to become a substantial operation, both in terms of manpower and time.

I devoted myself initially to studying the peasant economy and society close to the north coast, the region to the east of Cirebon. The research resulted in a series of publications under the auspices of the CASP and a monograph entitled *Control of Land and Labour in Colonial Java* (1983). I later conducted anthropological fieldwork in the same area, first alone and then with Gunawan Wiradi, one of our Indonesian counterparts. We reported the results of our village study, started at the end of the twentieth century and completed in the years that followed, in *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java* (2002). Jacques van Doorn and Wim Hendrix began researching the impact of coffee cultivation in the Priangan highlands long before the cultivation system was introduced. Wim Hendrix was the team member responsible for accessing the colonial archives. He described his findings in great detail in an unremitting flow of internal

working papers, adding his own critical comments. He also built up a collection of the sourced material, arranged by theme, which took on the dimensions of a small library. One of the historical documents he came across while gathering this source material was the report drawn up by Otto van Rees in 1867 to bring the Priangan system to an end. In an interim CASP publication, *The Emergence of a Dependent Economy* (1983), Van Doorn and Hendrix summarized developments at the halfway stage of the project and outlined the contours of the late-colonial era that was to be studied to complete the research project. The Van Rees report led to a major change in the colonial administration of West Java. The library of the University of Amsterdam has made the document, transcribed and annotated by Emile Schwidder, available online (Rapport van Rees UvA-DARE). The original Dutch edition of this book – *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid; het Preanger stelsel van gedwongen arbeid op Java, 1720-1870* – was published in 2010 (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam) and was also translated into Bahasa Indonesia. It was brought out in a slightly abbreviated format in 2014, entitled *Keuntungan kolonial dan kerja paksa; sistem priangan dari tanam paksa kopi di Jawa, 1720-1870* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor, Jakarta).

The whole project not only demanded considerable stamina and a broad perspective on the part of the research team, but assumed that their academic work would continue. That latter assumption proved incorrect. In 1986/87, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Erasmus University was trimmed down and there was no room in what survived for the Comparative Sociology Department. Jacques prematurely became professor emeritus. Wim also took retirement, while I was appointed to the chair of Comparative Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. Our splitting up in different directions derailed the Cimanuk project and made it impossible for us to keep to our agenda. But the scale of the work already done and the enormous database that had been brought together with such perseverance meant that the research, which we had embarked on with great enthusiasm, could not simply be abandoned. Wim Hendrix continued, now without pay, to retrieve files and official memoranda from archives and track down documents in libraries, to make them accessible, adding his incisive comments. In 1993, I agreed to write the entire history of the Priangan system, from its introduction to its abolition. This endeavour, recorded in this volume, was interrupted frequently and sometimes for long periods. That it was ever completed at all is due to Wim Hendrix's persistence. I dedicate this book to him and to the memory of Jacques van Doorn, to mark the many years of friendship we shared.

I am grateful to the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) for the grant awarded to me for the translations. Susi Moeimam has been very helpful in seeing the Indonesian edition to press while Andy Brown has once again translated my words into English. At an early stage Benedict Anderson patiently read through the Dutch version of my book manuscript. He made very helpful suggestions for alterations and additions but also strongly recommended bringing out an English edition. John Ingleson did the same and I am deeply grateful to both of them for their warm support.

Jan Breman
Amsterdam, December 2014

I The company as a territorial power

Intrusion into the hinterland

The name Parahyangan for the highlands of West Java dates back to the early-colonial era. The name, commonly referred to as Priangan, has been attributed different meanings. The most common one refers to this remote and mountainous region as a heavenly abode, where the land reaches into the sky. The vast wilderness was believed to have been more settled and inhabited once upon a time. According to one interpretation, the lands in the region had become wild and uninhabited. This recalled the social disruption following the fall and eventual destruction of the pre-colonial Hindu state of Pacacaran. Little is known about the history, organization and scale of the centre which must have been somewhere close to present-day Bogor. Archaeological finds from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provide evidence of its Hinduization but not of the agrarian order underlying it. De Haan (I 1910: 23) reported on the remains of this civilization at the start of the twentieth century. Prabu Siliwangi, the last ruler of the fallen kingdom, continued to fight against Islamized rivals operating from harbour principalities on the north coast. He was finally defeated in the second half of the fifteenth century by attacks on his territory from the harbour principalities of Banten and Cirebon (Ten Dam 1957; see also Ekadjati 1980).

Under the banner of the new religion the coastal rulers expanded their power to the thinly populated highlands. In the early stage of colonial domination this led Cirebon to claim control over the hinterland. A rival to fill the political vacuum in the Priangan region was the empire of Mataram in Central Java that underwent a process of expansion from the end of the sixteenth century. As Mataram's power grew, it annexed regions and peoples which had previously had little or no history of outside intervention. The ruler of Sumedang – who came to the court of the Susuhunan, the king of Mataram, on his own initiative, after a journey alleged to have taken three months (Van Rees 1880: 14) – was rewarded for his offer of fealty by being proclaimed his sovereign's governor in all lands to the west. The growing power of Mataram was evident from its subordination of regional chiefs and the immigration of small bands of colonists from more densely populated areas who opened up river valleys in West Java. Under the supervision of headmen who accompanied them, the colonists spread throughout the region and prepared the land for regular cultivation. The colonization also had a strategic purpose, to prevent the harbour principality of Banten from

extending its power into the Sunda highlands. The political supremacy of Mataram facilitated the Javanization of especially eastern Priangan, a region that – unlike the northern coastal zone – had until then lost little of its original Sundanese identity. It is quite plausible that the name Parahyangan dates from this time, referring to the unknown and unsettled lands over which there was still little control and which were far removed from the court that acted as the magical centre of the empire. In the 1670s, Cirebon was forced to acknowledge the primacy of Mataram, and its subordination was sealed by hypergamous bonds of marriage between the royal families.

After the failed siege of Batavia in 1628-29, Mataram was gradually forced to relinquish all claims to territorial control in West Java. At first, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was content to secure the countryside around its urban headquarters. In the course of time, this belt, initially only a few kilometres wide, increased in size, prompted by the need to grow food and provide building materials for Batavia. Privately operating entrepreneurs were granted permission to grow paddy, vegetables and other daily necessities. Within a short period, the first sugar mills appeared – the forerunners of an agro-industry that would remain in this region until the early nineteenth century. Later, these private estates went over to producing crops for export. The first franchise-holders were Europeans, Chinese and, to a much lesser extent, Javanese. Over time, the latter disappeared entirely, while the Chinese grew stronger. Employed by European owners, a number of these Chinese managers became entrepreneurs in their own right who remained dependent, however, on the VOC to market their produce. Henceforth, the cultivated belt around Batavia expanded on both flanks along the coast and gradually crept southwards until it reached the foothills. This first outer zone acted as a porous buffer to the remote and still unknown hinterland.

In the seventeenth century, after gaining a foothold on the coastal tract, the VOC was no longer satisfied with solely building its urban headquarters and occupying the surrounding countryside. The Company became a stakeholder in the struggle for control of the highlands. A first treaty in 1677 regulated the transfer to the VOC, as recognition for services rendered – military assistance in putting down an uprising in eastern Java – of the rights that Mataram had acquired over the Sundanese highlands in the previous century. None of the parties had a clear idea of the scale of the area covered by the agreement, also known as Pasundan. At first, the VOC was very cautious in making use of its new mandate. Local lords were told that they now had to obey both the Susuhunan of Mataram and the VOC. This simple instruction should also be seen in the light of the claims of the sultan of Banten to large parts of West Java, especially Krawang, Cirebon

and Sumedang. The withdrawal of Mataram had revived the aspirations of the Banten sultanate to regain and expand its stamp on the hinterland. The VOC successfully frustrated these ambitions in the years that followed. The rulers of Cirebon saw their subordination to Mataram replaced by an even more far-reaching dependency on the VOC. A treaty from 1681 obligated the priest-rulers of Cirebon to accept the suzerainty of the Company, a loss of autonomy that materialized in the building of a fortress, trade privileges and the surrender of all claims to adjacent highlands.

At the time when Mataram was expanding into the Sunda lands, both gentry and peasants initially fell back on the might of Banten. The sultan's protection extended to armed conflict which, as Mataram withdrew from West Java, took the form of attacks both along the coast and in the Priangan highlands. Such raids were common from the 1670s onwards. Bands operating under the leadership of Muslim leaders like Sjech Yussuf and Kiai Tjiliwidara strongly resisted outside intrusion in the area under the VOC's control, which was as yet hardly pacified. Eventually, this threat was also removed by sending military patrols to back up the persistent pressure exerted on local gentry. In the early eighteenth century, a rabble-rouser named Prawatasari caused considerable problems in the Priangan lands. Hailing from Giri, in Central Java, Prawatasari was alleged to have been sent to the Sunda highlands by 'fanatical clerics' to resist the new occupier. Known as a devout *haji*, he aroused the religious zeal of the population to resist the foreign infidels. The VOC ordered the regents to clamp down on the followers of this 'Mohamatan zealot', who subsequently sought refuge, together with his disciples, in remote Jampang. An expeditionary force sent to this sparsely populated and inaccessible southern part of the Priangan returned with the news that Prawatasari had been killed and his disciples dispersed. To avoid the risk of leaving a pocket of resistance behind in Jampang, all those who had settled down there were rounded up and brought back as prisoners. A large number of them managed to escape en route, many others did not survive the journey, and the remainder were designated a new place to live on the north coast (De Haan III 1911: 341-3). However, Prawatasari's reported death proved premature and in 1704 he resurfaced as the leader of an army of some 3,000 men in the hills above Cirebon, which further grew in size as it advanced to the coastal zone. The fact that he was able to advance to the immediate vicinity of Batavia suggested that some of the chiefs appointed by the Company were not to be trusted. The suspects were summoned to Batavia, imprisoned on charges of insurgency and then, having been put on trial, were lashed, beaten, branded and sent in chains to the Cape, banned for 50 years. This

punishment was also intended as a warning to the Priangan regents who were ordered to capture the insurgents within six months, otherwise they themselves would be arrested and punished. Despite all these threats and the continually rising price on Prawatasari's head, the unrest persisted and the fugitive remained at large. He was finally tracked down and arrested in Kartasura in 1707 and executed (Ricklefs 1993: 337, note 90). His elimination did not mean, however, that the VOC's rule in the highlands subsequently went unchallenged. Only three years later, there were reports that a new religious leader had emerged in Jampang and was rapidly gaining support among the population. He announced that his master was soon to join him, with a large company of followers (De Haan III 1911: 470). Within a year, this movement had expanded into the Batavian lowlands. The arrest of a number of leading insurgents could not prevent the agitation continuing in the years that followed. In 1715, there were reports, again from Jampang, that a certain Raden Dermakoesoema had gathered together a group of about 100 followers and was actively trying to persuade the chief of the region to support him. The VOC reacted to this news by holding the chief himself responsible for the uprising. He was accused of tolerating and supporting the rebels for many years and of being a 'good-for-nothing, a *madath* (opium) smoker and a cheat', and was sent in chains to Ceylon. After this experience the authorities in Batavia decided not to appoint a new chief for Jampang and to entrust the region in the future to the regent of Cianjur, who had remained loyal to the high command (De Haan III 1911: 470-1).

Enclosing the principalities of Cirebon and Banten on the coast by cutting off their communication lines inland allowed the VOC to put an end to Mataram's presence in the Priangan. A second treaty in 1705 confirmed the surrender of all the rights the now severely weakened Central Javanese kingdom had enjoyed in the Sunda territories. From then on the VOC acted as the only legitimate heir to Mataram's former possessions, whose exact size and location were never delineated. The border was clearest to the east, where the Cilosari river traditionally marked the dividing line between Java and Sunda. By 1706, the VOC's power was now so well established that it entrusted control of the land and people in the Priangan to the Pangerang Aria Cheribon, who had come to power as the company's agent. He was authorized to pass on the VOC's instructions to the local gentry and present their requests to the Company. When he died in 1724, the Company did not appoint a successor, no longer needing an intermediary. The directors in Batavia now did their business directly with the regents, individually or collectively. The eastern highlands, which initially continued to belong to

Cirebon, were subsequently split off from allegiance to the sultanate and were then elevated to the rank of regencies.

For a long time, the VOC remained unaware of the size and nature of the possessions it had acquired towards the end of the seventeenth century in West Java. The unrest continued and southern Priangan in particular remained a hotbed of resistance against the authority of the Company until deep into the eighteenth century. Clear geographical borders only became necessary much later as more and more became known about the landscape and greater demands were imposed on the inhabitants. The administrative structure was not established in any definitive form until the start of the nineteenth century. Under the new structure, the lowlands along the whole north coast of Priangan remained under the direct command of Batavia. In the broad buffer zone that had emerged between Batavia and Buitenzorg (Bogor), private estates were set up whose managers delivered their produce to the VOC. From the beginning, the southern border had been formed by the Indian Ocean. The eastern border remained essentially the same as under the agreement with Mataram and to the west, much later, a more precise border was demarcated with the sultanate of Banten.[1]

The foundation of Batavia was driven by mercantile interests and ambitions. The VOC's Eastern headquarters became integrated in much older networks of maritime trade that linked the Indian Ocean to the Pacific and extended from West and South to East Asia. A large number of harbour principalities, which rose and fell over the course of many centuries, acted as fulcra in this long-distance trade and Batavia adopted a similar role after it was established in the seventeenth century. The settlement grew to become a prominent centre of commercial activity in contact with a large number of similar coastal enclaves within and beyond the archipelago. The proximity to and interaction with outsiders – Gujaratis, Parsis, Bengalis, Klings, Arabs, Siamese, Malays and especially Chinese – underlined the international character of the trade. Only a very parochial view of history, like that which held sway in the late-colonial era, could see the arrival of the Dutch in the early seventeenth century as a decisive break in a trend that had already existed for centuries. Not only had they been preceded by other Europeans, notably the Portuguese and Spanish, but the newcomers also had to be satisfied with a modest position in this multi-ethnic trade network driven by competition and fierce rivalry. From the very beginning, the VOC aimed to achieve nothing less than complete control of trade in tropical products. Its main concern was to outdo its

1 These borders had been established as early as 1642. See Van der Chijs 1885: 474.

competitors and establish its own monopoly by concluding contracts that gave the Company sole marketing rights, by blockading 'hostile' harbours, by capturing ships carrying competitors' cargo, by destroying what were referred as 'pirate's nests'. Raids over land were largely limited to the coastal belt, targeting Cirebon or Banten. The troops needed for these campaigns were recruited from among the Buginese, Balinese, Ambonese, Madurese or Makassarese, contingents which were often readily available in the environs of Batavia. Like all mercenaries they were taken on and dismissed as the VOC saw fit, and the same troops could sometimes be found fighting on the other side. However, the exercise of power was primarily directed seawards and was supported by an extensive and far-reaching network of fortresses and trading posts. This was the role initially played by Batavia: the headquarters of a naval empire with little or no need for expansion inland.

This later perspective on the arrival of the Dutch in the archipelago was brilliantly construed and analysed by Jacob Cornelis van Leur shortly before the sun set on the Dutch colonial mission. His reappraisal of the patriotic doctrine of 'we came, we saw, we conquered' offers a more sophisticated view of early European expansion in Asia. What this reconstruction still lacks is an understanding that the long-distance trade was based on a more inwardly located mode of production that was predominantly – though not exclusively – agrarian in nature. The commercialization and monetization that dominated economic life in the small trading enclaves centred on harbour principalities was decidedly less developed in the main agricultural empires of inland Asia. Nevertheless, the long-held assumption that these societies lacked complexity and distant trade connections – consisting of a simple division between lords and peasants and an institutional structure typified by constant fluidity and turmoil at the top set off by an introspective, essentially static and subsistence-oriented village economy – must be considered obsolete. I am tempted to see the transformation of the VOC from maritime power to territorial ruler of wider tracts of Java in the light of my rejection of this erroneous interpretation. It means that the Company has to be seen as not only a maritime but also territorial power, as 'a political body exercising a particular form of sovereignty, as a Company-State' (Weststeijn 214: 27). This major turning point occurred at a time when the Company's trade within Asia was declining and the volume of goods being shipped to Europe steadily increased. The political and commercial transformation as made manifest in the records of the VOC was defined by shifts in the balance of power in the global economy, a process that would gather speed in the eighteenth century.

Retreat of princely authority

The intrusion inland in the second half of the seventeenth century was precipitated by the need to take sides in the domestic political constellation that was in constant turmoil. Lack of familiarity with the terrain made it difficult for the VOC's officials to manoeuvre their way through the bewildering variety of local ranks and titles. They tried to impose some order on it by using European synonyms: the most prominent of all, the Susuhunan of Mataram, was given the title of emperor, and below him were kings and princes, governors and barons, squires and captains, with local names being used for the remainder. The tendency of many local notables to claim a higher rank than they actually held only added to the confusion. Some local chiefs could trace their lineage all the way back to the Pacacaran royal family, claiming that their ancestors, by intermarrying at opportune moments, had transferred their loyalty to the rulers of Cirebon. The chief with the most senior pedigree, the *bupati* of Sumedang, called himself Pangerang, which VOC officials initially interpreted as 'prince'. Eventually, however, Batavia decided to treat all the highest ranking notables the same, making no distinction between them. This meant that the primus inter pares now went through life as a regent. Since it can be assumed that the differences in hierarchy could not have escaped the notice of the VOC for long, ignoring them so demonstratively can be seen as a clear signal that it intended to completely restructure the administrative management of the region.

Under the traditional order, which the VOC considered neither efficient nor effective, the exercise of authority was based on the principle of concentricity, with the Susuhunan of Mataram as the figure in which all power was concentrated (Moertono 1968: 112). He resided in his palace, the *kraton*, which was surrounded by domains that he governed directly. This epicentre of authority was in turn encircled by provinces governed in his name by a *bupati*. There were also differences between these latter territories: the 'outer regents' of Mataram, as the Company called them (of which the regent of Priangan was one), enjoyed greater autonomy than those in charge of provinces closer to the centre of the empire. These differences were not only geographical. In the Hindu-Javanese tradition, the prince was the embodiment of all power, a luminary radiating light with decreasing intensity as it moved away from the source. The mystic force that was the organizing principle of authority did not permit a territorial demarcation of the empire. The prince hardly moved around his realm, remaining in his *kraton*. His army was also quartered in the palace, rather than on the

borders. The empire was in a constant state of flux and continued to exist as long as the ruler remained the symbolic, even sacred, pivot. His power rested not on territorial jurisdiction, but on the exercise of authority over obedient subjects. Powerful was the chief who had a large peasant clientele which he could mobilize to build temples or irrigation canals or for military campaigns and upon whom he could impose taxes.

Exercising symbolic authority in this way was of course not sufficient in itself. The ruler could not do without a governance apparatus, to control and exploit his own territories and so that more distant provinces could be ruled in his name. In the Hindu-Javanese order, these tasks were not performed by civil servants in the Western sense of the word, but by a managerial elite. The governors were appointed under the condition that they themselves were responsible for controlling and exploiting their subjects in such a way that, in addition to collecting taxes and providing manpower for the prince, there was sufficient left over for the governor and his entourage.

> During the later Mataram period the king's administration was essentially a hierarchical line of separate, self-sufficient and highly autonomous units of power, vertically linked by the direct and personal ties between the several power-holders/administrators. Apart from the binding ties of a common servitude and loyalty, there did not seem to be any horizontal administrative relationship which could limit the monarchs' (inferiors') independence from each other. (Moertono 1968: 104)

Moertono quite correctly called this system imitative as, at each lower level, the authority of the chief remained undivided. Vassals also issued land to clients and ruled in the domains entrusted to them with absolute power. In other words, they were not officials to whom tasks were delegated, but lords in their own right. This made the political balance thoroughly unstable. The arbitrary manner in which those in power at every level treated their inferiors – there was always a risk that a patron would favour a rival – forced his clients to restrict their loyalty. It was a game of strategy and counter-strategy in which the stakes remained covert as long as it served the interests of both parties to maintain the relationship. A variety of mechanisms kept the tensions between centre and periphery under control. Marrying into a high-ranking family gave a client direct access to the patron, but this of course also gave the latter a lever with which to control the new family member. Through such marital arrangements, the gentry of Priangan had allied themselves with the ruling dynasties of Pacacaran, Cirebon, Banten and, finally, Mataram. Some prominent families

even claimed ties with all of these lineages, a claim for which there was often sparse factual evidence.

A long sojourn at court was another way that governors could show their loyalty. They were expected to at least attend the annual audience (*pasowanan*) and permission to be absent was considered a sign of trust.

> The pasowanans had a special function, namely to enhance the glory of the king. On special occasions, like the Garebeg, literally all of the king's officials from every part of the country were required to come. The glitter and pomp displayed on these occasions, and certainly not in the least, the great number of persons attending, were perceptible evidence of the king's greatness and authority. But from the point of view of the officials, to be included in such events was a great honour, particularly as the strict hierarchical arrangement of seating, the distinctive colour of their apparel and paraphernalia, and the number of persons in their entourages clearly displayed their exact place in the bureaucratic hierarchy (Moertono 1968: 99).

In the eighteenth century, Priangan regents would boast that their forefathers had swept the courtyard of the palace in the capital of Mataram. This information did not have the intended impact on colonial chroniclers, who tended to see such demonstrations of the subservient origins of the regents as evidence of disdain and worthlessness, rather than recognizing this symbolic chore as a sign of past prestige and glory. Staying at court for an unlimited period prevented the gentry from managing the day-to-day affairs of their own territories with adequate propriety. They solved this dilemma by appointing deputies authorized to act in their name during their absence. This system of substitution was not limited to the highest level of administration, but was applied right down to the lowest tiers of governance. Although the chiefs were entitled to appoint their substitutes from their own entourage, the presence of these shadow figures was illustrative of the inherent duality in the management of authority that allowed superiors to keep a close watch on those immediately below them. In addition to alliances through marriage and being retained at court for unstipulated periods, another way in which rulers could exercise their power was through the use of force. The chastising hand of a patron extended not only to a disobedient client, but also to the rebel's family and retinue. Imperial rule on Java was in precarious balance. Nevertheless, no matter how repressive and immutable the system appeared to be, the regime also allowed for mobility, since capable newcomers could force their way up to the seat of

the emperor from below or from without to grasp power for themselves. If they were more ambitious, they might even attempt to dismantle the system altogether and replace it by another. Such a radical transformation, a break in the existing structure of relations, occurred when the VOC penetrated into the Sunda lands.

A treaty agreed in 1677 brought Mataram rule in Priangan to an end and the VOC now had absolute control of the region. The transfer of power was formalized in 1684, when the Priangan nobility was summoned to Cirebon to receive their new instructions. The region was parcelled out in separate units, each given in charge to a regent. This administrative demarcation underwent several changes until five units remained – Sumedang, Cianjur, Bandung, Limbangan and Sukapura. These divisions were established, abolished, split up and merged again, often more than once. One significant intervention was not to acknowledge the vassalage of the gentry in the hinterland to the ruler of Cirebon. The decision to retain the native chiefs was a result of both the low managerial capability of the VOC and the compelling need to keep administrative costs as low as possible. The exercise of power was however completely reorganized. Although the first generation of regents came from families who had previously held positions of eminence, it did not mean a continuation of the *ancien régime*.

Territorial demarcation and hierarchical structuring

The early style of governance excelled in arbitrariness and indifference, as can be seen in the unexpected changes in the number and size of the regencies and the refusal to treat the chiefs as anything other than convenient pawns. Even after they were appointed, the regents could not be at all sure that they would be allowed to stay and dismissal or transfer were frequent occurrences. But was this high-handedness not equally a feature of the earlier despotic rule? The same applied to the rules of succession. Whenever there was a vacancy, there was no guarantee that a successor would be designated from among the previous regent's sons and it was not uncommon for an outsider to be chosen. The criterion for being appointed was not the length of the candidate's lineage, but his proven or suspected loyalty and trust in representing the interests of the VOC. Who would have dared to claim that this was a new practice that violated the traditions and customs of the kingdom of Mataram, which had so recently been displaced? From 1704, the Company undertook to provide the regents with a letter of appointment, stipulating the regent's tasks as a keeper of order and supplier

of products, but offering no great security of tenure. What seems at first sight to be a rather hasty and indifferent approach, with regents and regencies being designated haphazardly, was partly due to ignorance of the principles on which the indigenous power was exercised. If nothing else, it goes some way to explaining why the VOC found it so difficult to structure power relations to its own advantage. The regent families had no other choice than to accept the supreme right of the Company to appoint whoever it chose. After the death of the regent of Cianjur in 1707, for example, his eldest son travelled to Batavia to pay his respects (De Haan IV 1912: 346).

The advent of the VOC as the sole authority in the region represented a clear political break with the past in two respects. The first was that power was now based on territorial jurisdiction. The new regents held authority over all the inhabitants of their regencies and over them alone. This put a stop to the confusingly complex situation in which peasant households lived in a landscape with vague borders, and often had neighbours who were clients of another lord (see Breman 1979 and 1987a). It would take a long time for the new structure to materialize, but this slow impact – partly a consequence of the VOC's strategy of not intervening in the internal affairs of the regencies – did not detract from the importance of the introduction of a form of governance based on territoriality.

The second break with the past was the imposition of a uniform hierarchy on the relationships between the new regents and their superiors in Batavia. An impression had been prematurely created that the direct predecessors of these regents owed unconditional obedience to the ultimate ruler: the emperor of Mataram, or the sultan of Cirebon or Banten. For various reasons, all the parties involved later acquiesced in this interpretation which, in my view, is incompatible with the 'frontier' nature of the Priangan highlands in the pre-colonial and early-colonial eras. Furthermore, large parts of the region would retain a multi-stranded character along lines of allegiance in different directions until deep into the nineteenth century.

Under the old regime, the power of individual chiefs varied considerably. Only a few were directly accountable to the far-off royal court. The others had to acknowledge them as their superiors on the basis of hierarchical gradations that were often invisible to the Company officials. As already observed, this confusing and ambiguous configuration soon came to an end. The gentry who were appointed to rule the newly formed territorial units were all given the same rank and title, that of regent. More importantly, the idea of Priangan as a region in which the exercise of power had already crystallized into a more or less fixed pattern by the time the VOC arrived requires correction. This erroneous perspective is based on a view of the

coastal hinterland not from the aft deck of a merchant ship – according to Van Leur, the perspective from which colonial history was written – but from the courtyard of the *kraton*, the royal palace. It was a distortion that not only had its origin in the *babad*, indigenous records, but also permeated the annals of the VOC. This should come as no surprise, as the Company's chroniclers described indigenous structures on the basis of what they had been told by members of the aristocracy. It was very rare for them to make contacts beyond this received wisdom. In my view, however, the dynamics of power in Batavia's hinterland largely focused around local heavyweights intent on improving their status despite having very little room to manoeuvre. To consolidate or extend their power bases they were forced to seek support from higher up, which often entailed them entering into temporary as well as variable alliances.

This contrasting interpretation also offers a different explanation for the stubborn resistance and continually changing coalitions that the VOC encountered during its slow penetration inland from its coastal enclave. Another development that received little attention was the change in the balance of religious power. When the Portuguese first visited the coast in 1522, they found no Muslim rulers, but this had already changed when they returned in 1526. Islam had started penetrating the hinterland from the north coast before the VOC followed suit, but its social advance is neglected in the colonial records. The explicit Islamic identity of the leaders of resistance movements that made life difficult for the VOC and its allies was an indication of shifts in the basic frame of society, the consequences of which can only be assessed from a long-term perspective. When analysing the resistance that the VOC encountered to its efforts to expand, one needs to bear in mind that the instigators did not always or automatically act on orders from above – the *kraton* of Mataram or the priestly dynasties in the harbour principalities – but were responding to the loss of their own room for manoeuvre and the abrogation of their local power. Furthermore, the rebels often did not belong to a well-established elite, who rightly felt their position threatened, but had simpler origins and, while attempting to gain greater prestige, found themselves caught up in a political maelstrom. Only later would it become clear whether they had chosen the right side and could claim favours from the new ruler or would be labelled 'fanatical and mutinous zealots' who were fair game to all comers.

In this early-colonial era, the VOC forced the Sundanese nobility to accommodate themselves to a structure of authority formed along territorial lines and with a hierarchical structure headed by a regent. Once established, the regency became in the course of time – in fact up to the moment when

indirect rule was abolished in 1871 – a much tighter straitjacket for the supra-local elite than the more fluid situation they had enjoyed during the pre-colonial era. The Priangan retained the character of a 'frontier' until deep into the nineteenth century. This was largely due to the fact that, when the VOC started to intrude into the highlands, the region was sparsely populated. Expeditions sent reports back of an inaccessible landscape of mountains and valleys, and of thick forests and marshes teeming with wildlife. Early travellers never failed to give special mention to tigers and rhinoceros, because of the threat they posed to people and crops. The few settlements comprised little more than a handful of peasant dwellings and a poverty-stricken habitat. Even the *kota*, the residence of the regent, had only a few hundred inhabitants, the majority of whom were the *bupati*'s family members and servants. The constant stream of guests who presented themselves at the *dalem* – later termed *kraton* – included minor chiefs who were also accompanied by their own retinues. But even with these temporary residents, the population of the settlement remained small in scale. It was a centre of political power in a rural environment from which it was hardly distinguishable. There was little or no communication between the separate regencies. Connecting roads were rare and, though simple carts were in use it was much more common for people to carry goods by buffalo or on their own head or shoulders. The simple technology limited both the volume of goods and the distance it could be transported.

The Priangan highlands as a frontier

Cultivation entitled rights to the land but, if a local lord had taken the initiative to open up the land and had perhaps help provide the means to do it – by for example, supplying food and tools while the land was being cleared and more general logistical support – he would claim a percentage of the yield. He would not take his share immediately, to give those tilling the land time to build up a reserve stock, but after some years. In addition, the lord himself owned fields – known as *balubur* – in the immediate vicinity of his residence, which were laid out and tilled by his clients. Sometimes such a notable figure had worked his way up through his own efforts, but the custom was for a local influential to be designated the peasant households falling under his jurisdiction by a superior. There was a long and complex chain of patronage that led right up to the highest power – the emperor or sultan, later succeeded by the VOC – and down through the regents and lower chiefs to the peasants who spent their lives in servitude. How this

servitude operated in practice escaped the observation of the VOC officials, whose contacts with the indigenous population extended no further than the chiefs. The Company aimed first to shield the Priangan region from external claims and then to put an end to the persistent wrangling between the regents. These disputes, which could lead to armed conflict, were part of their struggle to defend, and if possible increase, their own political power and economic gains. The chiefs tolerated no competition in their own domain, but tried to recruit clients from households that were already in servitude to another lord.

In the peasant order that the VOC as it were inherited, labour was more important than land. Chiefs laid claim to peasants' labour power by attaching them in bondage. Their subordination was a source of conflict between higher and lower chiefs. If these disputes seemed to be about land issues, it was because the land was to be ruled, intended for peasants to be settled on and thus to become subordinated to the lord. This dependence took the form of patronage that extended to higher echelons. Benedict Anderson described this power configuration as follows.

> The administrative structure, while formally hierarchical, is in effect composed of stratified clusters of patron-client relationships. Both in the regions and in the center, officials gather around them clusters of personal dependents on the model of the ruler himself. These dependents' destinies are linked with the success or failure of their patrons. They work as administrative and political aides, and have no real autonomous status except in relation to him. They are financed by portions of the benefices allotted to their patron by his patron, or by the ruler himself if their master is highly enough placed. Just as the power of the ruler is measured by the size of the populations he controls, so the power of the subordinate official (patron) is gauged by the size of the clientele that he heads. (Anderson 1972: 34)

Jacobus Couper, who summoned the heads of the regencies in eastern Priangan to Cirebon in 1684 (those in the west not yet being demarcated), expressed the size of their jurisdictions in terms of the number of households allocated to each of them. The ceremonial appointment of the regents was accompanied by a warning not to interfere in affairs beyond the borders of their own territorial jurisdiction and not to attract people from other regions. That this warning had not the slightest effect became clear in 1686, when the regents were again summoned to come to Batavia with a record of the names and places of birth of all the people falling under their authority.

Anyone not on the list would from then on be treated as vagrants (Kern 1898: 26-7). This first attempt to register the populations of the regencies would be much repeated, each time producing a result in which, quite rightly, the VOC would have little confidence. Another early instruction from the VOC ignored the divisions between the local chiefs, encouraging them to cultivate new paddy fields in their territories. One of these was the Pangerang Aria Cheribon, whose letter of appointment as upper regent of Priangan in 1706 urged him to open up new land. The prince excused himself for his failure to recount the population of the Parahyangan by saying that the inhabitants had dispersed in all directions because of lack of food.[2] The very extensive use of land added to the low degree of sedentarization.

On the more densely populated plains along the north coasts of Java, peasants already practised a more advanced form of agriculture. The fields were irrigated and surrounded by dykes, and they had cattle and better tools to till the land. The terraced *sawahs* or irrigated fields that came to dominate the landscape here, were much less common in the Priangan highlands. Colonial sources gave the impression that peasant colonists had brought wet land cultivation with them from Central Java. In this view, the prospect of generating agrarian capital by investing labour in improving the value of the land was insufficient to persuade peasants in the Priangan region to settle down in one place to live and work. Agronomic research has shown that the technique of constructing *sawahs* was already widespread among the population of Java before the tenth century (Setten van der Meer 1979). It seems unlikely that the inhabitants of Priangan and other highlands were not familiar with this knowledge. Inscriptions dating from the fifth century AD and old Sundanese manuscripts show that wet land cultivation did not come to West Java at the same time as Islam, but must have arrived much earlier (Hoadley 1994: 26-7). So why did this mode of cultivation, which had become more common in the more densely populated lowlands in the seventeenth century, make such little progress in the Priangan highlands? The inhabitants of these regions would long display a stubborn preference for rainfed agriculture, despite its lower yield. Contemporary chroniclers suggested a different reason for what became branded as non-economic conduct. The lords of the land found it much more difficult to cream off the

2 Elsewhere in his report on the situation in which the country found itself, he gave a different reason for the migration: 'The people of the Priangan do not settle down quietly and peacefully because their large number of headmen are in conflict with each other and stir up the commoners to revolt, and consequently they forget about their obligations to the Company.' (Van Rees 1880: 90)

surplus from nomadic peasants and thus, according to Andries de Wilde (1830: 222), the latter were of no use at all to the government or anyone else. Not only was their yield much lower, it was also more difficult to estimate its volume. For the peasantry, remaining footloose was an effective means of avoiding lords wishing to lay claim to as much of their surplus as possible. According to an early nineteenth-century report describing the situation in interior Banten, the surplus the gentry eventually succeeded in appropriating was little more than 'a handful of rice and a few farthings'. This makes it clear why both the old and new elite urged their clients to practise wet land cultivation. Yet, despite all these efforts, what was largely seen as the destruction of the forest by primitive peasants would continue until deep into the nineteenth century.

Although Priangan gradually became less wild and inaccessible and expeditions were able to provide information on areas about which little had previously been known, the higher and more distant lands in particular remained largely uncultivated (see the map of the Priangan highlands). Colonists moved into the region from the valleys, but significant population growth was hindered by the absence of roads while the rivers were only navigable in the plains. Andries de Wilde, who founded the Sukabumi estate in the early nineteenth century and cultivated a small part of his huge property – covering an area larger than a province in the Netherlands – described the remoteness of the landscape where he started his pioneering work.

> In each regency, interminable mountain ranges and plains of enormous dimensions lie wild and desolate, yet would be extremely suitable for the cultivation of rice and other crops (De Wilde 1829: 15).

The southern regions of Priangan in particular were almost uninhabited. It was possible to travel for hours without seeing cultivated fields, huts or other traces of human activity. Colonial historiography attributes the low level of development to the exodus of the original population after the fall of the Pacacaran empire in the early fifteenth century. In this colonial interpretation, the victory of Sultan Hassanudin of Cirebon led not only to the fall of the Siliwangi dynasty, but also put an end to the Hindu civilization that had until then been dominant. Islam, after first gaining a foothold in the coastal zone of North Java, now also penetrated inland. The mild-mannered and peace-loving inhabitants of the highlands were unable to withstand their war-mongering neighbours from Banten and Cirebon. Holding on to the Hindu faith of their forefathers, they left the land of their birth to avoid

the enforced introduction of the new religion by the sword. The memory of their origins remained in the name they gave the land they left behind: *tanah preangan*, abandoned land. This apocryphal legend, recorded by V J.C. van Beusechem in 1836-7, is an invention of a past that never existed. It is more plausible that peasants abandoned their lands when there was reason to, for example during times of unrest, or came from elsewhere to escape the grasp of local lords, opening up the forested wilderness to which they had fled. Peasant life in Priangan under the *ancien régime* was always typified more by continual mobility than by settling down indefinitely. In the mid-eighteenth century, rebels in Banten still absconded to Priangan to escape subjection by the Sultan (Ota 2006: 61-2). The conversion from Hinduism to Islam did not bring about any sudden change in this situation. The religious transition took several generations to complete. A source from the end of the eighteenth century reports that, while strict Muslims lived on the coast, the religious practices of the inhabitants of the hinterland were mingled much with superstition (Ota 2006: 32-4). Lastly, there is little plausibility in the claim that Hinduism on West Java was once the foundation of a complex agrarian civilization and incorporated a large kingdom. Besides Siliwangi, there were a small number of other political formations, including Galuh in east Priangan, but these alliances were not deeply rooted or long lasting, dissolving as quickly as they were formed. What is known as Pacacaran was probably little more than a loose collection of local and small-scale kingdoms (Guillot 1991: 70). The Sunda highlands were never the heart of a highly organized agrarian order now veiled in mist. The region appears to have always been as it was when the VOC arrived: a frontier territory, sometimes expanding, sometimes contracting again, and slowly populated by colonists from outside.

Clearing the land for cultivation

The settlements that the early VOC agents encountered in the hinterland were without exception small, had few inhabitants and were almost exclusively located on or close to rivers. An initial census, dating from 1686, records 508 *negorijen* (settlements). Almost three-quarters of these (353) comprised ten households at the most. The largest had more than 20 households, but only a little more than a tenth of the total fell into this category (De Haan III 1912: 203). Many of the inhabitants had no permanent place of residence, leading a nomadic existence in the forest or in open fields. They lived in small family bands and survived by growing food on

a plot of land that they first cleared by burning away the vegetation and then cultivated using primitive tools. Little was written during the VOC era about their *modus operandi*, but a Swedish traveller through the Cirebon and Priangan regions in the late eighteenth century recorded that they cleared plots of land and then planted rice by making holes in the ground with a stick and dropping two or three grains in each. The harvest followed around three-and-a-half months later, during which time the peasants did little to tend the plants. The advantage of low maintenance was offset by the unpredictability of the yield. If there was insufficient rain or wild animals damaged the crops, the peasants' efforts came to nothing (Stützer 1787). De Haan also comments on the simple technology of these slash-and-burn cultivators.

> ... they have no buffalo; their only tools are a *bedog* (machete), *parang* (sickle) and *kored* (a hooked metal tool to pull roots out of the ground); they cooked their paddy in a bamboo basket. (De Haan III 1912: 216)

After one or two harvests, which yielded little, they would abandon their huts, made of branches, leaves and other non-durable materials, and move somewhere else, where they would also stop only for a short time. Usually, after some years, they would return to places they had abandoned earlier, where nature would have recovered from their previous presence. They also survived by hunting and gathering, which made them vulnerable to predators living in the forests and mountains of Priangan. Known as *jalma burung,* bird people, these *huma* or *gaga* cultivators, who possessed nothing and roamed around continually, were looked down upon for their rough and ambulant way of life. Settling them was considered a precondition to make them more civilized. From this perspective, a nomadic existence could easily lead to social impropriety (Geographische en statistische bijzonderheden 1835: 378).

Tipar tillers were also shifting cultivators and tended rain-fed fields, but they were agronomically more advanced than their *huma/gaga* contemporaries. They had better tools, including a plough or hoe, and a few head of cattle, which allowed them to till the land more intensively and increase their yields. Their huts, built to last five to seven years, were still simple, but were starting to look more like permanent dwellings. Their fields, also known as *tegal*, were located around the places they settled and were often abandoned *humas*. They would plant a tree on a plot of land to indicate that they had temporarily taken possession of it and intended to return in the future. The *tipar* peasants did not live clustered together,

***Gaga* (slash-and-burn) field of a nomadic cultivator in Jampang in the early twentieth century. The felled trees are laid out over the terrain to prevent erosion of the top soil and to terrace the hillside.**

Source: F. de Haan – Priangan, vl. 1, p. 376

but spread out over the land around the settlement. The scattered habitat made it difficult to determine their share of the total population with any accuracy, but they were in the majority until the early decades of the nineteenth century. The first step towards sedentary existence had been taken but not yet completed.

The *tegal* peasants were gradually ousted from their dominant position as tillers of the land by the owners of *sawahs*, irrigated paddy fields. *Sawahs* did not become commonplace in Priangan until the early-colonial era. Contingents of colonists from the coastal plain moved into the region in the seventeenth century, at the invitation of the regent of Cianjur, who was subordinate to the sultan of Cirebon, to construct irrigation systems and make the land suitable for permanent cultivation (De Roo de la Faille 1941: 420). In bad times, for example successive failed harvests or serious political unrest leading to war, not only did the influx of settlers come to an end, but there was even evidence of outmigration. Early-colonial sources speak of *buniaga*, strangers, who would arrive and join the inhabitants of an existing settlement. The longer they stayed, the more rights they acquired

and, although they would initially be dependent on a previously established peasant household, they would gradually till the land more autonomously themselves. There would also undoubtedly be incidences of one or more peasant households settling somewhere outside the boundaries of existing settlements and opening up wilderness land (see Peluso 1992). Due to a lack of information, we can only speculate on the extent of such 'wild' colonization. There is little more evidence of members of the landed gentry ordering their subjects to cultivate new land within their jurisdictions. This would take the form of group colonization, with clients of local headmen setting out with bands of peasants, to reclaim new areas, often close by but sometimes further afield. The report on an official survey of indigenous land rights, conducted in 1867, refers to large-scale migrations and attributes this form of organized mobility to a combination of economic and political motives.

There can be no doubt that the landed gentry promoted the development of sedentary farming and that colonists from other regions played a prominent role. Oral tradition does not stipulate when and how *tipar* peasants started to irrigate their fields, and whether this was at their own initiative or at the instigation of local chiefs, but it was a change that signified a break with their previous way of life. As sedentary cultivators, their socioeconomic security increased, with a lower risk of failed harvests, higher yields and the possibility of protecting their settlements against external threats, such as attacks by wild animals or robbers. The price they had to pay was the loss of the independence they enjoyed as footloose peasants, and it was for this reason that orders from above to lay out *sawahs* remained unheeded. The colonial explanation for what was seen as a rejection of progress was that the nomadic cultivators were lazy and satisfied with their hand-to-mouth existence. Nineteenth-century sources abound with this interpretation; in 1809, for example, the Prefect of the Cirebon-Priangan Regencies wrote to Marshal Daendels, the Governor-General, that he had given orders that more paddy be grown to combat hunger during the periodic food shortages. But his instructions to construct 'muddy fields' had little success.

> Urging on my part to expand the cultivation of paddy to ensure sufficient healthy food in the bosom of the Prefecture is contrary to the customs of the inhabitants, is considered onerous by them, and may be seen as one of the causes of their uprooting and moving elsewhere. (De Haan III 1912: 212)

By remaining footloose, the peasants were able to escape the grip of the lords. If they settled permanently, the landed gentry nearly always laid

claim to a larger share of their harvest. The gentry justified this practice by stating that they bore the costs of cultivation, and guaranteed the peasants' survival, offering them protection or even imposing it upon them. The peasants held ownership rights to the fields, while the builder of a water canal held control over the common land that it could be used to irrigate. Colonial enquiries carried out in the mid-nineteenth century confirmed that official permission was not required to take unenclosed waste land into cultivation (Van Marle 1860: 13). The inhabitants of a settlement were permitted to use the surrounding uncultivated land not only to graze their cattle and gather wood but also to grow crops on an occasional basis. Ownership rights to fields could only be claimed if they had been prepared for permanent cultivation, a time-consuming investment that required not only tools and draught animals but also a great deal of labour to build the *sawah* terraces.

The question whether the footloose peasants clung to their freedom or were prepared to exchange it for a form of socioeconomic security that would restrict their mobility is misleading, because in practice they were not free to choose. Nobles could only acquire clients by subordinating them. There was such an abundance of unenclosed waste land that the nomadic tillers had little difficulty in escaping the 'protection' offered to them. The only way for the gentry to restrict their mobility was to tie agricultural labour to the land. The sparsely populated and scarcely cultivated Priangan was essentially a region of 'open resources'. The Dutch ethnologist Herman Nieboer saw the incidence of unfree labour in pre-industrial societies as a consequence of free access to land. He argued that, if land were freely available, there would be no voluntary supply of labour and it would have to be acquired by coercion (Nieboer 1910). From this perspective, the Priangan peasants did not go in search of a patron, but were forced into servitude by the gentry. Sedentarization was the perfect means to put an end to the nomadic existence of the peasants. Laying out *sawahs* not only made it easier to cream off the now greater agrarian surplus of the peasants but also to tie them down in servitude. As clients, they enjoyed the support and protection of the lords in constructing paddy fields and in conflicts with third parties.[3] Conversely, the peasants had to hand over a share of their

3 De Haan gives an interesting example of the mutual support between patron and clients: '... a Chief in Cianjur has to contract out his clientele, so that he can pay a fine imposed upon him because one of his clients has committed a murder – a curious example of the solidarity between the Headman and his subordinates: the Head is punished for the misconduct of his clients and so retains them as his property.' (De Haan I 1910: 31)

***Sawah* (irrigated rice field) in Sukabumi in the early twentieth century**

Source: F. de Haan – Priangan, vl. I, p. 368

harvest to their patron and perform various services for him. In addition to tending to their master's fields, the peasants also had to be available at all times to carry out a wide variety of tasks in and around his house and grounds.

The relatively free space in which peasants were accustomed to move around as shifting cultivators slowly made way for a landscape covered with irrigated paddy fields. Although this process was accelerated by the influx of colonists from elsewhere, the transformation of shifting cultivators into sedentary peasants was of much greater significance. This progressive trend towards sedentarization may not have been the root cause of the subordination of the population of Priangan to the nobility but it certainly gave it a very powerful impetus by enabling the gentry to claim a share of the expanded food production of the peasantry and requisition their labour for corvee services. De Haan concisely summarized the motivation for coercing peasants into servitude: 'The wealth of a chief is determined by the number of hands at his disposal' (I 1910: 19). The VOC supported the gentry in their attempts to gain influence and status by acquiring clients. The Company's agents ardently promoted the expansion of sedentary agriculture from an early stage and called on local chiefs to put a stop to the peasants' mobility. An instruction dating from 1686 outlawed all those who failed to place

themselves under the control of a chief and insisted on remaining vagabonds (Van Rees 1880: 81).

Perennial cultivation of land by sedentary peasants had a positive impact on public order. The instruction received by the Pangerang Aria Cheribon on his appointment in 1706 urged him and the chiefs under his control to expand the 'paddy plantations' in their districts (De Haan II 1911: 250). The VOC's policy of imposing a hierarchical order of governance was not restricted to the top echelons but extended down to the base. Peasants were to subordinate themselves to the authority of a chief and would no longer be permitted to transfer their allegiance to a rival contender of power. For their part, chiefs were not permitted to persuade the clients of a rival chief to defect. Despite all these ordinances and regulations the area covered by irrigated paddy fields remained limited. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, even in the immediate surroundings of Batavia, food was still more commonly grown in dry fields and *sawahs* remained relatively rare (Hooijman 1781: 322).

The composite peasant household

The transition from swidden to sedentary agriculture brought about far-reaching changes in patterns of settlement. When shifting cultivators became sedentary, permanent settlements emerged. This transformation in their way of working and living certainly did not take place suddenly or evenly but evolved gradually over a long period of time, perhaps with temporary relapses into the former way of life. In the absence of records, it is only possible to speculate how the process developed. Although the interplay between the landed gentry and the peasantry was clearly the trigger, I believe it would be incorrect to assume that the initiative always came from the lords. Sooner or later, however, the emerging aristocracy, driven by its desire for distinction, succeeded in laying claim to a large part of the land and yield of the *sawah* farmers. They attempted to justify these claims by taking the credit for having instigated the cultivation of the land. As late as the early nineteenth century, Pieter van Lawick van Pabst,[4] at that time prefect of the Priangan lands falling under the jurisdiction of Cirebon, reported that the regent could not lay claim to any land that peasants themselves had cultivated (De Haan IV 1912: 778).

4 Referred to hereafter as Lawick.

The process of agrarian sedentarization also set in motion a progressive differentiation among the peasantry. Constructing irrigation systems and laying out terraced fields required much more labour than dry-land cultivation. Growing paddy in *sawahs* also took longer – around five and a half months – and labour needed to be continually available during this period, compared to *tipar* farming, where it was required only at the start and end of the three-month planting cycle. Preparing the soil was not very time-consuming and in terms of hours worked, it was much more cost-effective than tilling irrigated fields. Becoming a client for a noble, which sedentary peasants could hardly avoid, therefore meant a considerably heavier workload. The yield may have been higher and more dependable, but much of the surplus was cancelled out by the compulsory tribute. On top of this, sedentary clients were obliged to perform a wide variety of services for their patron, from which nomadic peasants were able to escape far more easily.

How did the owners of *sawah* fields fulfil this much higher demand for labour? It was no longer sufficient to call on the members of their own household, as dry-field cultivators were accustomed to doing during peak periods. Irrigated farming and the additional corvee imposed on the client required far more hands than the household itself could provide. The only solution was to acquire extra labourers. In my view, this must be seen as the origin of the *cacah*, a complex and stratified household that included not only the owner of the fields and his immediate family members, but also one or more sharecroppers and/or farm servants, known as *numpang*. The population was not an undifferentiated mass of peasants, each cultivating their own plot of land, but was divided into several categories. Patronage did not end with the peasant landowners, but continued on downward to the base of society. The head of a *cacah,* called *bumi* or *sikep,* was patron to the sharecroppers and landless labourers who served him as clients. These subordinate households cultivated plots of land that belonged to the head of the *cacah,* which he had entrusted to them in exchange for a share in the yield. It was in essence a sharecropping agreement which assured the *numpang* a third or half of the harvest: the smaller share if they provided only their labour and half if they used their own tools and draught animals. Their dependency was not only economic, but also social: *numpang* meant 'co-habitant' or 'dependant', concepts with a very literal meaning (De Roo de la Faille 1941: 421).

Similarly dependent, but more inferior in status, were the *bujang*, boarders or farm servants. The *bujang* did not form their own households, but lived in with their masters. They were young bachelors, sometimes members

of the master's family, who had the prospect of promotion to sharecropper if they started a family. The sharecroppers themselves could become *bumi* or *sikep* by cultivating land locally or elsewhere and achieving the full status of independent peasants by establishing their own *cacah.* Access to as yet uncultivated land was a precondition for this upward mobility and they were dependent on the protection and support of the gentry to cultivate it. Conversely, the head of a *cacah* could escape subordination to his *juragan* (lord or patron) by deserting him and becoming a client of another member of the gentry. He could then take refuge as a *numpang* under the protection of a new *juragan* (Scheltema 1927-28: 281).

Servitude was inherent to the composite peasant household, and was expressed in the relationship of dependence between *gusti* (master) and *ngawula* (servant). Hoadley has made a number of interesting comments about this social configuration in the Priangan landscape in the pre-colonial and early-colonial eras. I disagree, however, with his conclusion that the *cacah* was based on a relationship of debt (Hoadley 1994: 37-43). He offers no evidence for this claim, for example how the debt originated and why some peasants were subject to it while others were not. In my view, clients were forced into servitude not because they were unable to repay a debt, but because lords at different levels in the social hierarchy desired bonded subjects. This started at the top with the regent and continued right down to the subordination of farm servants by the landowners. The principle of servitude has its roots in the exercise of power through subordination. The first generation of Priangan regents appointed by the VOC were assigned a specific number of households, ranging from several hundred to more than a thousand. This subdivision was based on an implausibly low census figure, according to which the six regencies together had a population amounting to a total of less than 6,000 subordinate households. Although the term does not appear explicitly in the early Company records, I am inclined to believe that these units, which – according to the information provided by the household heads themselves – included their dependants to make up the *cacah* household as the cornerstone of the settled peasantry. The sources provide no conclusive evidence of the average size of such a household, often quoting widely varying numbers. It would be incorrect to interpret this variation as proof of the unreliability of early-colonial reporting. As mentioned above, composite households could comprise several families – including 'co-habitants' or 'dependants' – but could also be much smaller, especially in their early phases or, later, when dependent servants may have left to set up their own households. Unlike wet-land owners, dry-land cultivators did not need households with so many members and their unit

of cohabitation was consequently less complex. Structuring the peasant population within a hierarchy was a condition for the levying of tribute which, as we shall see later, would under the VOC become heavier than ever before. The head of a composite peasant household had sufficient labour at his disposal to practise irrigated agriculture, firstly to meet all his own food needs, secondly to produce a surplus for his patron, and lastly to impose a state of servitude on the servants and sharecroppers dependent on him to fulfil the services he himself was obliged to provide as client of a lord.

Over the course of time, an increasing number of peasants undeniably developed into sedentary and permanent cultivators of the land. Tying them to their fields and settlements meant that they had left their nomadic past behind. Those in power packaged this change of lifestyle as beneficial for the peasants, projecting the image of a rustic man of the land as a prototype of the happy and contented villager portrayed in later colonial documents.

> The *sawah* builder or owner of regularly irrigated paddy fields enjoys the greatest prosperity and is, in that respect, the most peace-loving and, in all respects, the most respectable. The prospect of a fixed annual income that is more than sufficient to fulfil his simple needs ensures that he does not exceed the bounds of his social obligations. He does not wish for any other property, and is not tempted to acquire it by criminal means (Geographische en statistische bijzonderheden 1835: 377).

With the increase in the number of inhabitants – which took place slowly and was more the consequence of a gradual decrease in the tendency to heavily underestimate the real size of the population than any genuine rise in numbers – some of the features that gave Priangan the character of a frontier society disappeared. It should not be forgotten that the colonization process continued until the late nineteenth century, and the population continued to be mobile even after the most primitive stage of nomadic agriculture was no longer the dominant means of livelihood. Although people did settle down close to their land, they could also leave again. The division of the population into agrarian classes suggests that the pattern of cultivation remained predominantly local. Landowners and sharecroppers fulfilled their basic needs by tilling land available in the vicinity. There were, however, peasants known as *panukang* who left their own villages to tend their master's fields, which were dispersed among several settlements. Landless labourers also found employment in various localities and did not work for one and the same landowner throughout the year. This leads me to conclude that there was an agrarian underclass that was relatively nomadic

and which receives little attention in the literature. References to these footloose labourers can only be found indirectly. In his 1836 monograph, for example, Van Beusechem referred to the low incidence of marriage in the Priangan Regencies in the preceding years and suggested that it was because a considerable proportion of the population was permanently on the move (1836: 8). The significance of this phenomenon cannot be understood without considering the claims that the landed gentry made on agrarian labour, both in opening up the region and in collecting the colonial tribute. This requires taking a closer look at the gentry itself, a social class that lived from the yield of agrarian production without taking an active part itself in cultivating the land.

Higher and lower-ranking chiefs

'Regent' was the name the VOC used for the select group of native chiefs that held power in the Priangan (De Haan I 1910: 338-57 and IV 1912: 325-38). That their numbers remained limited to five was more a matter of coincidence than a well-considered choice based on knowledge of the ranks and statuses of the indigenous aristocracy. The first chiefs to be designated as regents were those who could provide evidence – either real or fake – that they had been appointed by the ruler of Mataram. The VOC's directors had no understanding at all of the intricacies with which these lords competed with each other for power and status, though they were aware that attaching clients from among the population was a decisive factor. The Company tried to impose some kind of order on this opaque situation by taking decisions on the spur of the moment, with no clear vision of their purpose or reach. The lord of Sumedang could claim the oldest rights but his influence declined as that of vassals of the sultan of Cirebon, especially the lord of Cianjur, increased. However, the VOC soon enforced restrictions on the efforts of this harbour principality to extend its reach of control inland. It could do this only by assigning to itself sovereign rights and demanding unconditional loyalty. From then on, Batavia would decide which of the candidates for succession would be chosen. This would usually be a son, though not always the eldest, and if it were more opportune for some reason or another, it might be an outsider. Van Beusechem described this unpredictability in 1836 as the prerogative of absolute power. A regent could be dismissed if there were any doubts about his loyalty or good conduct. This happened to the regent of Bandung in 1802. The VOC also periodically reviewed the administrative jurisdiction without warning. The regencies

of Parakanmuncang and Bogor, for example, were abolished only a short time after being established. Sukapura and Limbangan, on the other hand, remained part of the Cirebon Priangan territories in the early nineteenth century, until the divisional administration introduced by Daendels came to an end in 1815. The territorial demarcation established after Dutch authority was restored remained intact until the end of colonial rule and, through strict implementation of the earlier policy of exclusion, the region retained its separate status. The claim, however, that the *ancien régime* was preserved in the highlands of Sunda ignores the far-reaching reforms that first the VOC and later the early-colonial state introduced.

The policy of territorial demarcation made no distinction between individual regents. This did not of course mean that their ancestral lineage, the size of the population in their jurisdiction and how this affected the colonial tribute were no longer of any significance, but they were all treated equally under the same rules, the essence of which was ranking them in juxtaposition. Relations between the regents were characterized by jealousy.[5] The main principle of territorial rule was that the entire population of a regency were subjects of the regent, while he could lay no claim to clients living beyond his borders. The colonial officials tried to create order in what they considered administrative chaos, where clients of rival lords often lived side by side. The reform carried out, based on the principle of territoriality, was justified in the name of proper governance, but the real motive was to make it easier to collect the colonial tribute. The VOC established its authority by cutting the chiefs' ties with their former rulers. This transfer of subordination was a long process and the new regime would only have acquired legitimacy gradually. Colonial administrators were uneasy about affairs being conducted behind the scenes without them ever finding out the truth about what was going on. They had every reason to fear that the chiefs were conspiring behind their backs and to be concerned about their hold over what they considered a seditious population. To defuse this threat in advance, the VOC had no qualms about encouraging the chiefs to pass on information about each other and stoking up their jealousy (De Haan I 1910: 342). The regents finally stopped resisting their territorial confinement when the benefits proved greater than the disadvantages.

5 'Their favourite pastime was to keep a close eye on everything their neighbours were doing, with the malicious pleasure of an old spinster, and to gossip about it to all and sundry, which made it extremely difficult for the Company to keep a check on the situation, and explains why its officials saw this dissension between the Regents, which was also cherished in the bosoms of the different families, as a useful means of governance.' (De Haan I 1910: 343).

The regents were expected to reside in the *dalem* or *dajeuh* (the Sundanese name for their residence), a complex of buildings initially constructed from bamboo or wood. They spent most of their time here, isolated from the outside world. At first, these residences were quite modest, their status clearer from their size than the material comfort and luxury they offered, but over time they began to look increasingly like palaces. The practice of keeping a permanent house in Batavia and turning up at random to 'pay homage' to their superiors in the Company's headquarters – just as their predecessors had regularly made the long trip to the court in Mataram – had become less common by the early nineteenth century. With their authority now territorially delineated, their superiors urged them to remain in their regencies. One old custom that was preserved was that each regent was permitted to retain two *patih*: one to run the lord's elaborate household and the other to take care of affairs in the regency and represent the regent in his dealings with lower chiefs and their following. *Patih* were usually a sons or other close relations of the regent. The *patih* responsible for external affairs would issue orders to the lower chiefs in the regent's name and was the hub through which all lines leading to the *dalem* first had to pass. As the highest-ranking servant, this *patih* lived close to the regent, but outside the enclave in which the latter lived a secluded existence.

The regent himself was considered too elevated to be troubled by day-to-day affairs. He remained at a distance and had little more to do than act eminently and emanate the sacred power that he personified. Roorda van Eysinga, who visited the regent of Bandung in 1821, had few good words to say for his host. The main *negorij* in which the regent's household was located may have been larger than a village, but it offered little more in terms of facilities. With three walls enclosing his court, the regent was both invisible and unapproachable for his people. His rare public appearances were accompanied by great pomp and circumstance. He was surrounded by a swarm of subjects carrying flags and lances. In Cianjur there were *radèns* (notables) everywhere, wrote Nicolaus Engelhard in 1797, contemptuous of what he had observed during his short visit to the regent's headquarters. The presence of lower-ranking chiefs meant that their duties in their own jurisdictions were taken care of by substitutes (De Haan IV 1912: 397). The larger population of the regent's *negorij* was intended to display his authority and enhance his prestige. Its residents were not subject to the same obligations as the majority of the inhabitants of the regency. This attracted people who were looking for an easier life than cultivating the land, so that the main settlements acquired a reputation as magnets for layabouts and good-for-nothings. It was always possible to find someone prepared to do

all kinds of jobs that could not stand the light of day (Geographische en statistische bijzonderheden 1835: 379-80).

The *patih* was assisted by a chief of police, who was responsible for maintaining public order. Criminal acts were investigated by the fiscal or *jaksa* who would also mete out punishments. The *jaksa* had a staff of constables and a small contingent of prison guards. However, this indigenous apparatus gradually lost its authority to deal with police and judicial matters and the jail in the headquarters would be used only for petty criminals. The resident made sure that more serious crimes, like murder and manslaughter, were tried by the circuit judge. Travellers from Sumedang to Cirebon would no longer be confronted with the sight of iron cages hanging on poles and displaying the chopped-off heads of robbers to frighten off others (Roorda van Eysinga 1830: 218). Lastly, the entourage of a regent would include a high priest, a chief *panghulu* and a chief *kalipah*, who would also be one of his kinsmen. Their presence and leadership in religious matters emphasized the sacred nature of the regent's authority.

Below the regents, who – with their *patih*, *jaksa* and *ketib* (a religious official) – were at the top of the pyramid of notables, there was a long chain of lower-ranking chiefs. The most important of these were in charge of the districts, territorial areas also established and demarcated by the colonial administration. Like the regencies, their number and size were arbitrary and also changed randomly. In 1836 the Priangan Regencies had a total of 73 districts: 23 in Cianjur, 14 in Bandung, 22 in Sumedang, 6 in Limbangan and 8 in Sukapura. Thirty years later, after being divided up, merged or abolished, 66 remained throughout the entire residency. Until 1790, the district chiefs were appointed by the regent, but he did have to put forward the candidate of his choice to the Commissioner for the Indigenous Population for approval. After 1790, this authority was transferred to the resident. In 1802, Pieter Engelhard, prefect of East Priangan, ordered that the *cutak* (district) chiefs should no longer hang around in the main *negorij* of the regency, but had to reside in their own districts, so that they could keep a closer eye on matters there. In an instruction dated 19 June 1808, Daendels ordered them to choose a village, as close as possible to the centre of their district, as their place of residence. The same instruction included the provision that one or two lower-ranking chiefs could be appointed in all other villages in the district; in the larger localities, *desas*, these were known as *kuwu* or *mantri* and, in the smaller hamlets with between six and ten households, it would be a *prenta* or *petingi*. All habitations or *kampungs* with fewer households were to be incorporated into a neighbouring *desa*. This meant that the inhabitants would actually have to move there. With

this blueprint the policy of territorial demarcation extended to the base of peasant society.

The administration of the main village in a district was set up in a similar way to the headquarters of a regency, though on a more modest footing. The chief's residence was smaller and built of less durable materials than the *dalem* where the regent held court. Like his superior, the district chief had a substitute who stood in for him during his frequent visits to the main *negorij*. Lower-ranking chiefs were expected to gather at his residence, whether he was there or not, as a show of their subordination and their instant willingness to carry out all of his orders. The colonial authorities put a stop to this practice, which they saw as frustrating the efficacy of governance. This clash between domestic and externally imposed views on how to exercise authority was of course settled in favour of the latter but, again, it was a gradual change that did not occur overnight.

The native chiefs belonged to two classes. The members of the high nobility, including the regent and his deputy, the head *jaksa,* the high priest and the district chiefs were *menak*. They could speak Javanese or Djawareh (a mixture of Javanese and Sundanese) and used this language in their correspondence. A small percentage of the privileged class learned the language by receiving instruction. In the early nineteenth century Resident Van der Capellen took the initiative of tutoring chiefs' sons in skills that would enhance their administrative capability. The *menak* were closely related to each other. The indigenous structure of authority was kinship-based, as the key positions – including higher religious ranks – were usually filled by members of the regents' families. The regents themselves made a significant contribution to the reproduction of the following generation. The regent who ruled Sumedang from 1836 to 1882, for example, had 101 children, 53 of whom were still alive when he died. He gave them all a number and kept a register, so as not to lose count (De Haan I 1910: 359). The list was, however, more than just a memory aid; the sequence of their birth played a significant role in the allocation of positions. One wife was, of course, not enough to provide him with so many offspring. The more *selir* (additional wives) a regent had, the greater his prestige. It also allowed him to consolidate his power by entering into marriage ties with lower-ranking chiefs (Bijdragen tot kennis 1870: 271). Providing jobs for his close relatives was an obligation that a regent had to fulfil, but it also had another purpose: it enabled him to build up a network that extended from the top to the bottom of the social hierarchy, through which he and his retinue could keep a watch over what was happening in their domain. Of course, this network could also be used to serve conflicting interests, generating divisions between the holders of

formal positions. Marriage ties in any case played an important role in the competition for prominence. In 1805, Lawick noted that the regent of Parakanmuncang 'had married and remarried so often that most of the chiefs were related to him' (De Haan IV 1912: 390).

The second class of chiefs were the *sentana,* referred to in colonial reports as landed gentry. They had their roots in the agrarian order and retained close contacts with the peasantry. They bore titles like *asep*, *ujang* or *agus* as an indication of their distinguished origins. A chain of command extended down from district level to the peasantry at large. At the base of the hierarchy of nobility, the *lurah* or his deputy, the *panglaku,* received orders from their superiors. The orders were brought by the *lengser*, a messenger whose name indicated that he did everything instantly, and came from the *bale-bandong*, a kind of office that served as an administrative centre in the district. The orders that were sent down the chain came from the *camat*, who acted as substitute for the district chief. The Javanese name *wedana* was not introduced for the district chiefs in the Priangan Regencies until 1846. Before then, they were known as *kepala cutak*, a reference to their most important task: collecting the share of the paddy harvest that the peasant landowners were obliged to relinquish to the regent. The village priest, the *lebeh* or *amil*, also played an important role in these worldly tasks. He did not restrict himself to officiating at religious meetings and teaching children about the Koran, but helped collect the *padi zakat*, the tenth part of the paddy harvest destined for the religious leaders and which eventually reached the high priest in the regent's entourage, via the district *panghulu.* As one of the few who could read and write, it became the task of the village priest to register births, marriages and deaths. He was also responsible for vaccinating children against cowpox and helping to collect the tenth part of the harvest destined for the regent.

Behind this line of command, there were many other chiefs whose duties, mutual relationships and position in the hierarchy are more much more difficult to pinpoint with precision. Colonial administrators were thrown into confusion by the enormous diversity of ranks and distinctions that they found themselves confronted with: *umbul, temanggung, patih, wedana, panglakue, ngabeh, lurah, petinggih, pencalang, pangerang, demang, kliwon, mantri, kepala, lengser, pangkat, priaji, jaksa, camat,* etc., etc... It was an endless and colourful parade of important and less important dignitaries, the infinite differences between which the VOC, and later the governor, had great difficulty in distinguishing. They vainly sought the key that would show them where these notables fitted into the hierarchy: who gave orders to whom and about what, and how was this reflected in the demarcation of

tasks between them? These were questions with no conclusive answers. The hierarchy was not necessarily arranged in a clear-cut vertical ranking, with superiors and inferiors. Chiefs could belong to the entourage of the same higher lord, alongside or even in conflict with each other. They were rivals competing for power, not officials with clearly defined mandates within an administrative apparatus.[6] They had no qualms about transferring their loyalty to another patron or poaching clients from their rivals. Their room for manoeuvre contracted, however, as the Priangan started to lose its frontier character. Nevertheless, out of sight of the colonial administrators, defections to another lord continued until deep into the nineteenth century.

Rendering servitude

The introduction of territorial demarcation did, however, reduce this tendency to switch loyalties. It was no longer possible to achieve upward mobility by seeking the protection of another regent or moving somewhere else with your entourage and cultivating new land. The head of a *cacah* could work his way up to become what was known in the colonial records as a 'minor chief', just as notables in higher echelons tried to gather more clients around them so as to strengthen their standing with their own, or perhaps another, lord. The important issue was not how many clients a regent needed to fulfil the duties of his office, but how he could bind his clientele – a hard core of trusted followers with a looser and more fluid group of less trusty 'hangers-on' – in servitude by rewarding them for the services they performed for him. These included an endless flow of goods and services from below, a sizable proportion of which had to be set aside for redistribution. The collection of 'donations' was widespread (De Wilde 1830: 188-9). The seizure of goods and corvee ran from above to below, imposing the heaviest burden on the landless peasants at the base of the hierarchy. De Wilde described this situation succinctly: 'In all these respects, the chiefs follow the example of their regents; and, as such, each is in his rank a greater or lesser oppressor of the common man.' The top of the pyramid was linked to its base not directly but through a profusion of intermediaries over which the colonial administration had little oversight and even less control. Yet it was here that the hierarchical order was most dynamic – continually

6 Hoadley describes the situation in similar terms: 'A chain-of-command, a hierarchy of power, or even the delegation of authority existed only to a very limited extent in Javanese governmental practice.' (Hoadley 2004: 148)

expanding and contracting, rising and falling. This was partly due to the tendency of the notables not be content with their legal due, but to make deals with smart operators working at their own expense and risk. In these transactions, the *jago* as handyman or troubleshooter for the elite long played a prominent but underexposed role.

Servitude was primarily expressed through the obligation of landowning peasants to relinquish a part of their paddy harvest to their lord. The district chief was responsible for collecting this *cuke* (harvest) tribute. In the settlements in his district, it was collected directly by the *camat* or one of his officials. The village priest was also involved, as part of his responsibilities for checking the schedule of agricultural operations, which also included when to sow the seeds, how to maintain the irrigation system, etc. A third part of the *cuke* went straightaway to the minor chiefs, who were closer to the peasants. The share destined for the regent did not leave the village immediately, but was stored until the order came for it to be transferred to the *dalem* or the main settlement in the sub-district. In earlier times, this tribute would have been limited to only a twentieth part of a harvest, but that was when rice was grown by shifting cultivators on dry soil that had been only roughly cultivated and would only be used temporarily (De Roo de la Faille 1941: 422). Both the low yield and ease with which the nomadic peasants could up and leave made it impossible to increase the tax. Generally, the owners of *sawah* fields had to relinquish a tenth part of their harvest. Newcomers and those cultivating new land, however, were entitled to a temporary exemption, usually for three years. For reasons that remain unclear, after an inspection tour of the Priangan, Daendels decided to increase the *cuke* to a fifth part of the harvest. The chiefs would be entitled to the full tenth part that they received, rather than sharing it with the religious leaders, who would now also be entitled to a tenth part for their involvement in the agricultural process. This unexpected doubling of the tribute would fuel the unrest that was already widespread around that time, especially among the people of Cirebon. As well as having to hand over a larger share of their food production, the peasants had to fulfil a large number of other obligations, the most important of which was working in the chief's fields. Although the landed gentry used sharecroppers to cultivate their land, they also demanded that all *cacah* provided labour. The households belonging to a lord, *juragan,* would provide these services in turn, sending one of their members to perform this work, known as *tugur,* for perhaps one day a week. All those holding a position of authority were exempt from this obligation, as were the elderly, the disabled, and the needy. Newcomers were also exempt for the period that they did not have to pay the *cuke.*

Servitude occurred in two forms. The *panukang,* peasants who owned no land themselves and were permanently employed by a lord as share-croppers, represented the most onerous form of servitude. They received a share of the yield from the land they cultivated and also had to work in the stables and households of their *juragan*. The second group consisted of the *rahayat*, peasants who sought the protection of the lord voluntarily (De Waal 1866: 367). This lighter form of servitude required a show of ritualized deference and was known as *mengawula.* The relationship between the lord and the peasant was one of patronage. Van Rees discussed the concept of servitude in his report, explaining what it entailed in great detail. Peasants chose subordination to seek 'shelter from the rain' by entrusting themselves to the protection of a man of standing (*ngali dung*). In other words, they preferred subordinating themselves to a lord, in the expectation that he would not overburden them with obligations, to exposing themselves to the arbitrary forces that threatened them from all sides if they remained unattached (Van Rees 1867: 47). Moestapa defined the concept in similar terms: 'serving a Lord with labour and other impositions, in exchange for being released from more general burdens' (Moestapa 1946: 114, note 3). A client could rely on his lord protecting him from claims to his livelihood resources from others. From this perspective, the bond was not imposed from above and by force, but from below and willingly. It was an honour to be a client of a powerful man and perform services for him, while the lord could increase his prestige by expanding the size of his retinue. Territorial proximity was no consideration in the attachment of peasants as clients.

> The suzerainty of each chief was comprised of the possessions of his subjects, irrespective of where they were located, such that the bond that tied the heads of peasant households was based not on where they lived but on the lord to whom they were obligated. (Eindresumé III, 1896: 129)

De Roo de la Faille summarized this principle of subordination succinctly as follows: 'living where they were, serving where they wanted' (quoted in De Haan IV: 415). Territorialized governance, as introduced by the Company and more rigorously imposed by the early-colonial state, put an end to this customary exercise of authority.

What was the social standing of clients? They were considered to have been among the better-off among the peasants. They owned land and, as the head of a *cacah,* had *numpang* (co-habitants) and *bujang* (boarders) who were their clients, just as they themselves were the clients of a higher lord (De Haan IV 1912: 413). The servitude was discretionary and varied

according to the claims the lord imposed on his clientele. Just as the head of a *cacah* had to be aware that a co-habitant or boarder might desert him, a higher lord who demanded too much ran the risk that his clients might transfer their loyalties to a rival. A Sundanese saying expressed this perfectly: 'Turn your face, change your lord' (Moestapa 1946: 210, note 6). Such switches of allegiance sometimes entailed moving to another locality, but not necessarily (De Haan I 1910: 361). Peasant and lord were separate social positions, but they depended on each other. There was no lack of lords at the tail end of the peasant order, not only because the gentry owned a large share of the agricultural holdings, which were cultivated by sharecroppers, but also because the head of a *cacah,* albeit a peasant in his own right, was himself a *juragan* to whom dependants were bonded. Society in the Priangan was therefore not divided into two segments, but a multiplicity of interdependent strata based on patronage, in which patrons had dependants while they themselves could be clients of higher lords. It was a society characterized by vertical ties, in both directions. The top and the base of the pyramid were linked through a chain of mediation. This rectifies the view that only regents practised clientelism. As De Haan correctly observes, the large majority of the *rahayat* did not serve regents, but belonged to the retinue of lower-ranking chiefs. Van Rees came to the same conclusion in his report while, remarkably, Pieter Engelhard took this view as early as 1804 (De Haan IV 1912: 411). Lords tended to use discretionary latitude in their treatment of their clients, taking account of their circumstances. If a peasant was unable to pay his full tribute because of a failed harvest or some other temporary setback, his patron would settle for a smaller share than he was entitled to. He might also demand smaller shares from new clients to keep them content. The threat of desertion or defection to another lord may also have tempered the severity of the terms of servitude. The relationship was fluid and negotiable, varied according to the situation in which both parties found themselves and with its closeness and duration. A good lord knew how to tie new clients in servitude and to keep them that way, while a good client would subordinate himself, but with reservations and always one eye open for more attractive options.

Peasants and their lords in the early-colonial era

Servitude is primarily seen as a form of subordination, with the emphasis on the burdens that it brought for the clients. But, as mentioned above, they consented to their dependency in the expectation that the patron would be

able and willing to restrain his claims on their labour power and the yield of their harvest. Furthermore, as with patronage in general, the relationship was not only economic in nature. A patron's entourage served to enhance his power and prestige and make him more resistant to competition from his rivals. In his description of the state of Java in 1799, Van Hogendorp showed that he was aware of this facet of servitude, despite the critical tone of his final judgment.

> The armed Troops, that the Regents could mobilize in this way, are little more than an unruly, undisciplined Mob who, at the first shot, fall or flee, and are more troublesome than helpful, and are therefore of no use at all to Society, and never shall be, as experience has taught us so often. And not only do the Regents make such misuse of corvee or personal Servitude; but their Pepattijs, Brothers, children and many Mantrie's or lower Chiefs extract from the Dessas, that the Regents have given them, as many people as they can muster, with no other intent than to show their status and greatness. (Annexe LL, *Eindresumé* III 1896: 154)

Van Hogendorp was of course correct in concluding that the peasants had little appetite for fighting. Large-scale and regular conflicts or far-off raids were relatively rare. They would only be called upon to settle occasional conflicts closer to home: disputes between a lord and a rival, attempts to persuade or coerce peasants to defect from their patron, or just mobilizing them for a show of force or grandeur. An important facet of patronage, as suggested by the passage quoted above, was the use of clients for a public display of prestige. As already observed, the wealth of a regent was expressed by the 'number of hands he had at his disposal'. Riding around on a horse with an armed entourage, large hunting parties, tournaments and receiving higher or lower chiefs in the presence of spectators at public meetings all served to illustrate the grand status of a patron, while the retinue of clients basked in the glory and power of their lord. Such a display of prestige required that the peasants treated their superiors appropriately. But the man who prostrated himself at the foot of the regent and crawled towards him in humble submission was in his turn a lord who demanded shows of *hormat*, respect and the greatest possible humility, from his subordinates. The landowner was never sure of his property, as the lord could seize it at any time. Regents and chiefs in the Priangan would still requisition the horses and daughters of their clients until the mid-nineteenth century (De Haan IV 1912: 439-40). Such dispossession of property was considered an honour rather than theft. Adapting themselves to the customs of the indigenous

elite if and as long that suited them, colonial administrators did not stop at urging chiefs to make their womenfolk available for sexual favours. A few colonial commentators expressed their disgust at such practices, of which even residents were guilty (Van Hogendorp 1913: 40).

Under the colonial regime, the relationship between peasants and their lords changed radically. This was of course primarily due to the tribute imposed by the new rulers. How this happened and what impact the much higher taxation had on the agrarian order will be examined in detail in the next chapter. What I wish to emphasize here is how these claims brought about far-reaching changes in the structure of society. An early indication of this process, which would undoubtedly have taken place even if the VOC had not penetrated inland from the coast in the second half of the seventeenth century, was the pressure exerted on nomadic peasants to adopt a sedentary existence. However, as described in the first chapter, the arrival of the Company accelerated the opening up of the Priangan. Even more significant was the administrative organization of the colonized areas on a territorial basis. Higher and lower-ranking chiefs were no longer rivals in the struggle for power but were assigned an area of jurisdiction, within which they could – in fact, had to – conduct themselves as lords and were authorized to impose taxes on all the inhabitants, but had no rights to subordinate those living beyond their demarcated borders. Of course, it took a long time for this new regime to take hold. Ties with dependants who lived far off, beyond the designated jurisdiction of their lord, continued to exist for many years and were expressed in displays of respect (*bakti*) to their former patrons. The lords of Cirebon, for example, stubbornly continued to consider the chiefs they had nominated in Cianjur as their vassals (De Roo de la Faille 1941: 420). The VOC took decisive steps to end such practices.

The policy of territorial confinement also applied to the peasants, though in their case it was implemented with hard-handedness. The ban on them transferring their allegiance to another chief, which came into force in the mid-eighteenth century, considerably weakened their options for changing patrons or moving elsewhere. Sedentarization was considered an indication of the progress of civilization in colonial times, as proof of growing security since the people no longer felt it necessary to keep moving around. A change presented as an improvement was actually a deterioration, in that they were no longer able to negotiate the terms of their servitude. This resulted in the situation that inspired Nicolaus Engelhard to describe the claims and power of the chiefs as a yoke from which the peasants could no longer escape (Engelhard to Elout, 12 April 1821). Not only were dependants no longer permitted to terminate the relationship with their lord, neither could they

The regent of Indramaju, accompanied by a *haji* (drawing by Rach 1770). According to colonial archivist F. de Haan, this is the only known portrait of a regent from the VOC period. De Haan noted that the native nobility were eager to imitate the dress style of VOC officials – the regent is wearing knee-breeches and a cocked hat. He failed to mention, however, that colonial civil servants also adopted native codes of distinction, such as *payungs* and the palanquin.

Source: Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia Collection, Jakarta

use it as a threat if he raised their tribute. The ban on wandering from place to place, introduced in the early-colonial era and reissued repeatedly in the nineteenth century, had the same effect. The punishment for anyone not heeding the order to have a permanent abode was to be put in detention. Later, the government started to detain vagrants in workhouses in the main *negorij* of the regency, where they could be hired as coolies. An instruction dating from 1833 reaffirmed that vagrants who could not be found guilty of a specific crime must be consigned to 'agricultural establishments' and set to work (Van Deventer 1866: 177).[7]

The colonial policy of reorganizing governance put an end to the flexibility and fluidity that had characterized the relationship between lord and peasant. Authority was exercised much more than before on the basis of clearly defined task descriptions that established mandates and competences with orders that were carried out along hierarchical lines. Giving primacy to the interests of the VOC and later those of the early-colonial state required on the one hand a greater emphasis on the subordination of the peasants to their lords, while on the other hand restricting the diverse and discretionary claims that the latter imposed on their subordinates. Withholding the option for peasants to transfer their allegiance to another lord in fact intensified the burden of their servitude. A long series of early-colonial instructions to restrict the claims that the lords imposed on their dependants did not immediately have the desired effect. As we shall see in the following chapter, however, this did not mean that the instructions of the colonial authorities were simply ignored. The chiefs continued to cling to the institutions that were familiar to them and tried to defend their own interests and preferences, but eventually had to bend in the direction in which they were being pushed. They lost their freedom of manoeuvre and operated from within an apparatus over which they had no control. They found themselves trying to please both their own lords and give priority to the wishes of the colonial officials. Their negotiating space declined and it became increasingly difficult for them to escape the claims imposed on them by their foreign superiors. How this process developed and what impact it had on the peasantry will be described in the following chapter.

7 These were depots where labour could be hired out for public works or to private employers which Van Sevenhoven, in his function as Director of Cultivation, wanted to set up (see Chapter 7).

II The introduction of forced cultivation

A colonial mode of production

Early accounts of Dutch expansion overseas describe the rule of the Javanese princes as feudal. Use of this term is, however, based not on an in-depth study of indigenous social organization, but suggests a rather loose parallel with the agrarian order in Medieval Europe, with princes, vassals and subject peasants as the main actors. Burger, for example, described a social landscape populated by subsistence and village-based households supplying goods and services to the feudal nobility (Burger I 1975: 33). Van Leur rectified this viewpoint by arguing that the structure of power in the large Javanese principalities was different from what was understood under feudalism in Europe. The difference lay mainly in the way in which power was exercised, rather than in how the peasants were coerced into providing goods and services. Van Leur follows Max Weber in describing the pre-colonial state in the interior of Java as patrimonial-bureaucratic. It was a regime in which sovereignty and the right to property were concentrated in the person of the king. Family members and a chain of favourites shared in the king's rule, without ever being entitled to use their positions of eminence to claim any independent authority or legal security. Their main tasks were to collect tributes and to mobilize military and labour power for the monarch (Weber 1922: 679-723). More recent authors have also characterized these societies as patrimonial (including Schrieke I: 169-221; B. Anderson 1972: 8-22 and 33-43). Wittfogel suggested a different model referred to as 'oriental despotism' to describe the specific nature of the early agrarian civilizations in Asia. The strongly centralized despotic rule of the king was founded on large-scale irrigation works constructed with peasant labour. This is a variant of the theory of the Asian mode of production that Tichelman applied to pre-colonial Java (Tichelman 1975; see also P. Anderson 1974: 462-549).

I am concerned not as much with which label best describes the *ancien régime*, as with what replaced it when the VOC expanded its authority into the hinterland of Java from its headquarters in Batavia. The Company's directors themselves adhered to feudal notions when introducing the system of territorially-based governance. In their records they referred to issuing letters of fealty and fiefdoms to the regents as vassals. According to Hoadley, the measures taken by the VOC led to a feudal mode of production on West Java towards the end of the eighteenth century. During what he

refers to as a process of feudalization, the people of the Priangan were cut off from free access to land as their means of livelihood. As the new ruler, the VOC declared itself the rightful owner of all these resources and derived from these usurped rights that it was entitled to impose claims of a tributary nature on peasant labour, using the regents as intermediaries (Hoadley 1994: 148-151; 184-5). The problem with terms like feudalism or the various forms of patrimonialism remains that they are applied to other times and situations than those for which they were originally coined. This is equally true of the concepts of 'political' or 'mercantile capitalism', traces of which Van Leur identifies in pre-colonial and colonial Asia. That is one reason why I, following Wolf (1982) and Banaji (2010), prefer to speak of a tributary mode of colonial production. An essential element was the mobilization of agrarian and other forms of labour using political rather than economic means, in the exercise of authority and domination (Wolf 1982: 79-82; 400-4). The emphasis must lie on the creation of a new, externally imposed social and political order rather than on the continuation of earlier despotic rule. The system of taxation that the VOC introduced at an early stage in the regencies it had established in the Priangan must be seen in this context. Establishing governance along territorial lines, coercing the peasants to adopt a sedentary mode of cultivation and restructuring social relations according to a strict hierarchy were all given a powerful boost when the VOC, as the supreme authority, began to lay claim to the peasants' labour and the commodities they produced. After establishing itself as a political force, feeling its way in physically and socially unknown terrain, the Company devoted itself with much greater urgency and passion to converting this newly acquired territorial power into economic gain. The VOC's main purpose, after all, was to appropriate commodities at the lowest possible price, a type of exploitation Banaji branded as 'Company capitalism' (*ibid.*: 270). Its attention was not focused exclusively on the highlands behind Batavia, but extended along the whole north coast of Java. To assess the importance of trade to the VOC, it is necessary to examine its economic activities in the region. Taking my cue from the work of Van Leur, I rely for a case study on Luc Nagtegaal's monograph on the VOC's penetration into the Pasisir region on the north coast of Java between 1680 and 1743 (Nagtegaal 1988). It was during this period that the Company also succeeded in slowly gaining control over the Priangan highlands.

Nagtegaal rejects the long-standing assumption that the peasant population was predominantly – or even completely – subsistence-based and that the market had no role to play in rural Java. He shows that, on the contrary, trade was an important component of the agrarian economy. Furthermore,

the commodities on sale were not surpluses left over after the peasants' basic needs had been met, but were grown or produced specifically for the market. Nagtegaal concludes correctly that the VOC's problem was not the difficulty of introducing new crops which were of little or no interest to the peasants, but how to gain control of the production and marketing of agrarian commodities. There were no separate circuits in which various sorts of products were traded. Nagtegaal distinguishes three interlinked market levels, based on distance: regional, interregional and inter-insular. The merchants operating in these markets had varying amounts of capital at their disposal, but the commodities they bought and sold were largely the same. Van Leur distinguished various forms of what he called 'peddling trade' in his overview of early-Asian trade (1957: Chapter II). The bigger merchants often bought goods for export from peasant markets, while products from elsewhere would find their way to domestic consumers through peasant traders. The goods were moved primarily by water traffic, explaining why the main *pasars* were located on rivers that flowed into the Java Sea. A study of early maps suggests that there was considerable economic interaction between settlements spread along the river banks at some distance from each other. The routes to the highlands also ran along these rivers. The first expeditions to the Priangan region from Batavia did not travel overland but, as long as the river was navigable, by boat. This remained the main mode of transport until well into the nineteenth century, explaining why Cirebon was initially able to remain the main centre for collecting the tribute imposed by the VOC in Priangan.

The VOC stayed away from the peasant markets, which were generally comprised of a large group of part-time local traders, often women, who exchanged small quantities of goods over short distances (Nagtegaal 1988: 43). The Company did take an interest in interregional trade, which was focused on the larger settlements. It was, however, unable to compete with the longer established merchants who were of a wide variety of nationalities, including Hindus from India, Moors from Malacca, Javanese from Banten, Europeans (including Danes and Englishmen), free citizens from Batavia and, last but not least, Chinese. Members of the Javanese aristocracy, including local regents and high-ranking officials at the court of Mataram, were also active in long-distance trade and sometimes provided the cash or credit that was required. Merchants from Solo came to Semarang overland, hiring porters for their convoys en route. As already mentioned, the VOC had little success in these intermediate markets. Its operations were still too large-scale and inefficient and the network it built up was not sufficiently fine-meshed. What the large trading company from afar lacked was regular

and intimate contact with the peasant population. In that respect, the Company was no match for the Chinese merchants who had been established on the north coast of Java for much longer and had become more deeply embedded in the local economy. Its coastal factories suffered from high costs and complained of persistent losses. The VOC changed tack and tried to persuade the regents and the merchants who worked with them to stop selling to all parties and do their business exclusively with the Company. The attempt at monopoly initially failed because the Javanese had more to gain by encouraging competition between the traders from outside.

The VOC had little choice other than to focus on the centres of inter-regional and inter-insular trade. But this strategy could only succeed if the Company could also secure control over the more local trade circuits. That meant resorting to political alliances at trans-local level. In the 1677 treaty, the emperor of Mataram granted the VOC a number of trade privileges – including sole rights to the sale of opium and textiles and the purchase of sugar, the pre-emptive right to buy up rice, and exemption from customs duties – and placed all foreigners in his kingdom under the Company's control and jurisdiction. Further steps were required to actually put these agreements into practice, including protecting the long-distance trade routes. By cancelling out Banten as a staple market – achieved in exchange for supporting the 'right party' in a conflict between the rulers of this harbour principality in 1684 – the VOC ensured that all inter-Asian trade would in the future be channelled through Batavia. Nagtegaal's research contradicts the portrayal of a closed peasant economy in which a market was entirely lacking or limited to barter. There was clear evidence of the onset of an early form of capitalism, in both trade and production, also beyond the *pasisir* (Java's coast to the east of Cirebon). The influence of international trade in the port of Banten was felt deep in the hinterland of West Java and was accompanied by a much more advanced degree of monetization than reported in later colonial accounts. The subjects of the emperor of Mataram had to pay a head tax in cash, which was collected by the local chiefs. In the Priangan Regencies, towards the end of the seventeenth century, this amounted to one *real* per *cacah* (De Haan I 1910: 26). There is no reason to believe that money was used only to pay taxes. The rural economy comprised a wide variety of activities, and part of the resulting produce was sold in markets in the harbour towns on the north coast. Goods from overseas, for example textiles from India, would pass through these trading centres in the other direction and make their way to the rural hinterland. Furthermore, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the supply of opium which the Company imported from abroad

increased exponentially and, despite resistance from Javanese rulers, was forced upon the local population.

From free trade to forced delivery

The VOC's interference in the local economy was not limited to its ambitions to acquire a hegemonic position in trade. In the early eighteenth century, it became increasingly involved in the production process itself. The Company had a shipyard in Rembang to build its own ships. Sawmills supplied the wood and ropes were manufactured from coconut fibres in Semarang. Of greater significance was an instruction ordering the peasant population to abandon the traditional method of producing indigo. Around 1700, a number of Dutch indigo-makers arrived to supervise the new process, based on the technique used on the Coromandel coast in India (De Haan III 1912: 412-3). The experiment was a failure, however, and in the mid-eighteenth century Jacob Mossel made a renewed attempt, again without success (Hooijman 1781: 301). The VOC also initiated the cultivation of coffee at the start of the eighteenth century. This commodity, at that time completely unknown to the local population, would in the course of time expand to become a monoculture. Before examining this in greater detail, however, I would like to reiterate how, in the early years of the VOC's control of the Priangan, the region initially supplied the Company with a much wider variety of products.

Under the treaty that put an end to the remaining self-governance of Cirebon in 1681, the sultan was no longer permitted to trade with Makassarese, Malays, Moors or any other foreign merchants. The inhabitants of the harbour principalities were not allowed to sail further than Bali or Borneo, and then only if they had a pass from the Company. The demolition of the city walls and the construction of the fortress – called *De Bescherming* (Protection), a name given with no irony intended – illustrated the coercion exercised by what remained, in effect, commerce *pur sang*. The closure of the transport route to and from the highlands heralded the start of a process of exploitation of the inhabitants of the hinterland, which would gradually grow in scale and intensity. The records of the factory manager in Cirebon show that the entire production of crops like rice and pepper was bought up by Chinese middlemen, who also sold textiles and opium to the local population. The VOC official complained that these brokers engaged in smuggling, so that not all the goods found their way to the VOC's warehouses. In 1691, the Resident urged in a letter that the inhabitants of

the Priangan be paid directly in cash (Hoadley 1994: 102). This was driven, however, much less by concerns about withholding remuneration to the peasant producers than by a growing awareness that the system of bulk buying by middlemen was causing a serious decline in profit margins. As a consequence, the VOC started to intervene much more directly in the process of agrarian production. For example, it started employing paid labour to fell trees for timber (Peluso 1992). This was because the demand for timber had risen so excessively and, along with it, the pressure of work, that the required labourers failed to turn up or deserted. There was no guarantee, however, that the payment actually reached the labourers themselves, as it was paid out to the chiefs. Hoadley, who retrieved this information from the VOC archives, correctly points out that the supply of commodities by the peasants had not formerly been based on forced labour (Hoadley 1994: 105-6). The Daily Register of 1694 includes an instruction ordering buyers of cotton and indigo to pay the producers promptly. Letters from Cirebon a year later indicate that peasants were only prepared to supply good quality indigo if they received a decent price. And in 1729 and 1739, the Resident proposed giving peasants cash advances, or at least paying them for the number of coffee plants they cultivated. These proposals, which were never put into practice, were intended to increase production by devoting greater attention to agronomical considerations. As the system of bulk buying gradually declined in importance, the Chinese merchants disappeared from the scene. The princes of Cirebon were banned from appointing Chinese officials, as a result of which, although they did not entirely lose their influential position in the indigenous economic and political network, they were certainly sidelined. This dislocation was expedited by placing them under the direct supervision of the Company. The only authority that they retained was as managers or as estate owners in the areas surrounding the capital, with rights to land and the peasants living on it. Growing and milling sugarcane became important business in these environs and the Chinese held the upper hand in this agro-industry which showed distinct capitalist features (Hoadley 1994: 109-1).

From the experience it had gained at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the VOC learned that, if it wanted to lay claim to peasant labour in a way that was both effective and profitable, it was both necessary and desirable to work through the chiefs. Ignoring them had resulted only in persistent obstruction and sabotage. Direct contact with the population only undermined the chiefs' authority. The Company felt that it was too risky and costly to fill the resulting social vacuum. In a resolution in 1695, the High Command in Batavia ordered

the chiefs to supply a wide variety of goods (De Haan III 1912: 399). The instruction contained all the elements of the system of quotas that the Company had adopted. In the first place, the receipt for the goods delivered was to be accompanied by a note that, the next time, more of the same goods, and others as well, should be supplied. The quantities reaching the VOC's warehouses were never enough to satisfy continually rising demand. Secondly, the instruction announced that cash payment was to be made for goods received, without going into further detail about the size of the payment or other conditions. Thirdly, the instruction gave no indication of how the chiefs should proceed to ensure the cooperation of the peasants. The system of quotas assumed that the Priangan peasants would obey their lords, taking it so much for granted that any discussion on the matter was deemed unnecessary.

The quantitative change introduced in the early decades of the eighteenth century – a progressive increase in the quotas – was accompanied by a qualitative change. The earlier products, such as birds' nests, cardamom and wax, increasingly made way for indigo, cotton and, above all, coffee, which would eventually replace all the other goods almost entirely. This trend reflected the shift in the VOC's activities from the purchase of high-quality commodities in small quantities, mainly for sale on Asian markets, to the acquisition of much larger volumes of tropical products to be shipped to the Company's entrepôts elsewhere to meet new and swelling consumer demand in the global market. Although rice did not fall under the quota regime, transit notes drawn up in Batavia show that the VOC shipped as much rice as all the other trading companies together, a share that increased even further after 1730 (Nagtegaal 1988: 175). The overarching importance of this staple food, which was still largely bought up by Chinese merchants based in Cirebon and other coastal towns, was not entirely separate from the system of forced delivery. To pay off the debts it had accumulated when the VOC assisted its military operations in East Java, Mataram had agreed to supply the Company with 800 *koyang* of rice a year after 1705 (the equivalent of about 2.8 million pounds weight). This war tax accounted for a considerable share of the total volume of the VOC's trade (Ricklefs 1986: 18).

The cooperation of the chiefs may have required the exertion of considerable pressure, but was mainly achieved by rewarding them financially. In 1698, the VOC made it clear that nothing could be gained without continual pressure. A regional chief who had not fulfilled his obligations to supply goods was in default, but this was not yet followed up by sanctions (De Haan III 1912: 414). The intermediary role imposed on the gentry was very lucrative for them. The money they received was a form of payment for their

mediation: making sure that the peasants worked hard enough, keeping outsiders out of their regions and preventing practices that were contrary to the Company's interests. Conversely, if they followed their instructions loyally, they could be assured of retaining their positions of eminence and of protection against rival attacks on their power base. Involving chiefs in the Company's operations naturally reduced their independence and room for manoeuvre. According to Hoadley, however, the benefits were so large that they were not tempted by resorting to 'illegal' transactions, for example selling indigo, cotton or coffee to Chinese buyers, as well as rice. Smuggling or violating the rules in some other way may have been more profitable, but the risks were great. If they were caught, they might be dismissed or transferred, meaning a loss of power and income. From this perspective, the regents gave in to the demand of the Company´s agents because of the financial rewards they received. But did the peasants cooperate for the same reason? This is of course a distinct possibility, but loses some of its cogency in the face of evidence that payments intended for the peasants often only partially, if at all, reached them. Does this imply that their cooperation was based on coercion rather than choice? Hoadley rejects this conclusion, arguing that, until the mid-eighteenth century, coercion had not been the driving force behind the acquisition of tropical products under the bulk purchase system. In his view, the main incentive was money, and the VOC's strategy was tempered by fear that a more rigorous approach might lead to conflict (Hoadley 1994: 128, 132-3). In my opinion, Hoadley overestimates the freedom of the peasants to trade with their chiefs under the old regime. I will return to this issue of voluntary or coerced cooperation later in this chapter.

The start of coffee cultivation

The VOC first became involved in the coffee trade in the seventeenth century, in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The first plants to reach Batavia, just before the end of that century, came from the Malabar coast of India. According to the VOC annals the coffee shrub was imported to Java towards the end of the seventeenth century but there is good reason to believe that this was done through the mediation of Muslim traders or pilgrims (Clarence-Smith and Topik 2003: 5). A few high-ranking Company officials planted the first saplings in their gardens. After receiving a sample of the harvested beans in 1706, the Company directors in Amsterdam sent a letter to Governor-General Van Hoorn recommending that coffee be grown on Java. At the end of 1707, Van Hoorn informed his superiors that he had

distributed young coffee plants to a number of chiefs on the coastal plain between Batavia and Cirebon who were willing to take good care of them (Leupe 1859: 56). It soon became clear, however, that the coffee shrubs would not thrive on the low plains. Transferring them first to the hills of Krawang and then to even higher upland produced a much better result. The regent of Cianjur was the first to send a consignment of beans weighing almost a hundred pounds to the Company, in 1711. The price he received – 50 guilders per *pikul* (in 1695, 1 *pikul* was equivalent to 125 pounds) – was reasonable although, compared to the prices on the Dutch market, a little on the low side. Other regents in the Priangan also endeavoured to introduce coffee. Early sources suggest that this was not too difficult as coffee was a crop that required no capital, no expensive tools and a minimum of knowledge (De Haan I 1910: 119). The new crop spread quickly, especially in the remote hilly hinterland to the south of Batavia which, by the middle of the nineteenth century, would expand to become the main cultivation area for this export crop on Java. The VOC would become one of the main suppliers of this new colonial commodity. In 1726, it controlled half to three-quarters of the still modest global trade, half of which was grown in Priangan, first and for all in the regency of Cianjur (Knaap 1986: 34).

In the early stages, coffee growing was exceptionally lucrative for the VOC, while the regents also saw their incomes rise enormously. When he died in 1726, the regent of Cianjur had amassed a fortune of 26,000 *rijksdaalders*, on which he also earned interest. The chief of Kampongbaru was even richer: he was owed 32,000 *rijksdaalders* by the Company and owned considerable land and buildings in the environs of Batavia. This generosity soon came to an end, however. The first restriction was to bring coffee under the VOC's monopoly regime. From 1723, it was an offence to sell coffee to private merchants. As negotiations on price and quantity with the chiefs made way for forced delivery and they no longer had a free choice, the relationship became increasingly based on coercion. This change became very clear when some years later, in 1726, the Company board introduced a radical price cut, expressing fears that the peasant producers were becoming too wealthy and might use their new funds against the Company's interests, for example to buy weapons (Knaap 1986: 41; Ricklefs 1993: 215). This sudden discovery that the natives were subversive by nature, together with doubts about the loyalty of the regents, strengthened the VOC's resolve to lower the prices it paid. In the first instance, the price was reduced by half but, on closer inspection, even this sizable cut seemed insufficient. In 1726, acting on the orders of his superiors, the Governor-General decided that five, rather than 21, *rijksdaalders* per *pikul* was sufficient reward for

this relatively light work. As an excuse, the Company claimed that it had insufficient cash and now argued that the coffee replaced the tenth part of the yield it was entitled to as the ultimate owner of the land.

The cuts aroused resistance among the peasants. The available archives do not give a full picture of the scale on which this occurred. One indication is the murder of the regent of Cianjur, the largest supplier, a few months after the radical price cut in 1726. He was the only chief in the Priangan ever to be killed by his subjects. It was later claimed that he was killed by a jealous lover of one of his wives, but the account that the murder was committed by a lower chief who was indebted to him is more plausible (Knaap 1986: 33). A cause of greater concern to the VOC than the unrest was that, in some places, the peasants destroyed the young coffee plants. After all, the price cuts had been intended to increase the Company's profit margin, not to reduce the supply. In 1726, the Resident of Cirebon complained that coffee gardens were being neglected and becoming overgrown. Other reports told of labourers who had come to the Sunda highlands from the coastal plain of Cirebon in previous years to harvest the new crop were leaving again (*ibid.*: 45-6). These expressions of protest suggest that, in the early years, the proceeds from the sale of the coffee did not disappear exclusively into the regents' pockets, but that at least part must have filtered down to the peasant producers themselves. In Cianjur and Kampongbaru, the main centres of production at that time, the damage was so enormous that it would take more than 60 years to restore it to its former level. De Haan, the source of these and later data, concludes from the price cut that the free labour of the past had given way to servitude and what had been a trade transaction now became a form of tax tribute (I 1910: 122). This interpretation is supported by the measures the VOC took in response to the flagging interest in growing coffee. Batavia issued an order to 'urge the lazy folk' to get back to work and took the obvious step of blaming the native chiefs for the unrest – which could not be ignored – among those subordinated to them. The regents and lower-ranking chiefs were accused of keeping the coffee money themselves, rather than passing it on to the peasants. In this view, the problem was not the excessively low price, but the chiefs' failure to pay the producers. To curb the extortion and fraud of the gentry – many of whom were suspected of increasing their income substantially by smuggling – it was suggested that European inspectors be appointed.

In 1729, the Resident of Cirebon ordered all households in the Priangan highlands under his jurisdiction to plant ten new coffee trees each year. The regents in Cianjur, Kampongbaru and Djatinegara also reported that they were having to resort to increasingly harsh measures of discipline to

Change of horses and *pasangrahan* (accommodation for travelling officials) at Cimanggis on the road from Batavia to Bogor (drawing by Rach ca. 1770-72). Behind the bushes in the left foreground, the district head of Cimanggis can be seen walking, followed by two servants who are carrying the attributes of dignity to which their master is entitled. The main figure is in the centre foreground: the high-ranking VOC Commissioner [D.J. Smith], with *payung* being held above his head. He is a young man, who owes his lucrative office to his uncle G.G. Van der Parra.

Source: Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia Collection, Jakarta

persuade the peasants to grow coffee. They informed the Company that, if prices did not go up, coffee cultivation was doomed to disappear. Their request was rejected, as the measures taken to rectify the situation – essentially the use of greater coercion – proved successful. In fact, they exceeded even the wildest expectations: the harvest was so high in 1735 that the VOC ordered the regents to stop the annual planting of new trees and to extirpate the oldest trees. This instruction was justified by claiming that the peasants themselves did not own the land, but grew coffee on the orders of the Company. As the Company also owned the trees, it was entitled to insist that no more coffee should be produced. The VOC directors in Amsterdam had no objection to their agents ordering the trees to be destroyed, as long as they were replaced by other crops, like paddy and, especially, pepper. The great difference between the official price and those on the black market led to a considerable increase in coffee smuggling, a problem that was only

marginally affected by closer surveillance. When, some years later, supply once again fell behind demand, the order was given to stop destroying the trees and plant new ones again. If the peasants had ever received a share of the coffee proceeds, this would certainly have been much less after the price cut, which would not have increased their willingness to grow more. As long as the VOC had not yet established a fixed position in the market, the volume of coffee it sold continued to vary widely from year to year. The budget available to finance the coffee trade was already limited, making production for the world market risky, and this risk was passed on to the peasants of the Priangan. The lack of understanding among the planters for the continually changing orders from Batavia to deliver more or less coffee must have been exacerbated by the fact that the first payment for all the cultivation work done would not be received until after the first harvest four years later, while they were not paid at all for cutting down the trees. Refusal to increase or decrease the number of trees was punished heavily and inspections were carried out to ensure that the growers complied with these orders.

Increasing the tribute

Although the imposition of forced cultivation was a radical change, it initially only involved relatively small quantities. Coffee was most likely first grown only on the regent's own land, around his *dalem*. The trees would be tended by peasants in turn, in the form of corvee services (De Haan I 1910: 154). When the Company increased the volume that had to be supplied, trees were also planted on the land around the peasants' own dwellings. They would take the harvested beans to the local chief or directly to the warehouse. Little labour would have been required for cultivation, maintenance and picking. There was a long-cherished belief that, after planting, the growers had very little to do other than wait until the ripe beans fell to the ground, after which he could gather them together with a light, wooden rake. They would then be dried in the house or under a veranda and, after the shell had been removed, they would be ready for delivery (De Haan I 1910: 149; III 1912: 581). The work was allegedly light, required no training and could be performed by all members of the household as a minor but welcome supplement to their main preoccupation: growing food.

Of all the products that the people of the Priangan supplied to the VOC, coffee was ultimately the only one that remained. Initially the beans were mainly traded for consumption in West Asia and the Middle East. From

the Ottoman empire the beverage started to spread to Western Europe around the middle of the seventeenth century (Clarence-Smith and Topik 2003: 26-7). As the strongly fluctuating sales in the early years showed, the Company initially held a modest position on the global market. It had to try and increase its share, especially on the Atlantic markets, and benefit from coffee's slowly growing popularity. It had not yet become a drink of the masses, but the volume being traded had risen so strongly that it was no longer a luxury commodity whose supply had to be restricted to keep the market price high. The point had already been reached before the mid-eighteenth century when it was no longer sufficient to grow coffee around the peasants' abode. To continue to fulfil the Company's orders, the dry land around the *kampungs* had to be cultivated. There was plenty of waste land available at first, and the trees were planted on soil that had only been roughly prepared. The undergrowth was removed to make room for the young plants, but larger trees were left where they were. In the first year, paddy was planted between the coffee saplings, so that the work to cultivate the soil also had some immediate economic value. The first harvest of what came to be known as 'forest coffee', took place after four years. It was delivered in the same way as the coffee grown in the *kampung* courtyards, to the local chief or directly to the warehouse. In the early years, this new mode of cultivation was limited to settlements close to Batavia, on relatively low lands extending only as far as Krawang and Bogor. It made sense to expand cultivation in places where the people already had experience of growing the new crop but, given the difficulties of transporting the coffee over great distances, it was more important to keep the supply lines to Batavia as short as possible. The lack of roads, bridges and modes of transport were undoubtedly significant factors in choosing the first areas for production. The areas selected for cultivation were transferred first to the foothills of the Priangan and later even further inland after it was discovered that the coffee grew better at a higher altitude than on the hot coastal plain. The regency of Cianjur, colonized by migrants from Cirebon, would grow to become the VOC's main coffee-producing region in the eighteenth century. The harvested beans were initially carried to the coast along footpaths by porters with *pikulan*, carrying poles. The paths were later widened to allow transport by buffalo or packhorse.

Although the VOC succeeded in increasing the coffee quota, transport remained a problem. Before the mid-eighteenth century, two transit warehouses were built on the banks of the Citarum and the Cimanuk, at Cikao and Karangsambung. From there, the coffee was transported to the coast by water in boats. Because both rivers were not navigable upstream from

these points, the coffee had to be brought in over land by pack animal, a return journey of at least two months. Especially in the eastern Priangan, the coffee planters took a long time to carry their harvest to the collecting stations. The coffee was weighed before being loaded onto pack animals and transported to the transit warehouses. Because there were an insufficient number of animals, porters were still necessary to help carry the steadily increasing volume. It was heavy work: a single load weighed a quarter of a '*bergse pikol*' (55.5 pounds). A buffalo could carry a double load plus enough rice for the driver.[8] It was also common for the planters, who were only responsible for delivering the coffee to the small district warehouses, to be charged for the costs of transporting the goods further. These costs were deducted from the price the producers were paid for the coffee. Poorer peasants in particular, without their own pack animals, would be keen to deliver their harvest at the earliest opportunity, resigning themselves to the substantial deduction for the quantity of beans they had delivered. Planters who undertook the long journey themselves would often not return in time to tend to their rice fields. It was more important to ensure that the coffee arrived on the coast before the onset of the monsoon than to allow them to plant and harvest paddy in the proper season and therefore give priority to secure their livelihoods.

A harvest of 100 pounds in 1711 had expanded to some 100,000 *pikul* a century later. This massive increase was only the start of a much greater increase in volume in the decades that followed. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the concentration of coffee production in the Priangan region, which had started earlier, continued. A revision of the quota regulations in 1763 almost entirely exempted the lowlands adjacent to Batavia from compulsory coffee cultivation. Private estates in this region, closer to the coast, not only survived but even increased in size and number. Since the VOC bought coffee and other commodities on which it held a monopoly from these large-scale agrarian estates at low prices, the owners preferred to sell their goods directly on the urban market in Batavia. The main actors in this market were Chinese moneylenders/bulk buyers (Boomgaard 1986). They were not permitted, even temporarily, to roam around as free

8 As early as 1805 Lawick, appointed as acting commissioner, reported hearing from a regent 'that, instead of using pack animals, the people carried the coffee to the warehouse themselves', that '1,200 people from the district of Galonggang were employed to carry the coffee' and that 'these people had been given such heavy loads that they succumbed under the weight...' Elsewhere, he said that the Regent took the buffaloes away from the people, so that the latter hid them from sight and therefore had to carry the coffee themselves, with the result that many succumbed (De Haan III 1912: 636).

traders in the Priangan region. They were known as notorious breakers of established monopolies and were kept safely at arm's length. Not far enough, however, as the difference between the excessively low price paid by the Company and what these clandestine traders were prepared to pay was too great. The lands around Batavia acted as a buffer zone in which coffee beans bought up underhandedly in the hinterland could be whitewashed. VOC officials were, of course, also party to these illicit practices and the quantities involved must have been considerably larger than suggested by the official records. When coffee cultivation was moved further into the Sunda highlands, it imposed a heavy burden on the sparser population settled there. To ease the burden a little, the VOC gradually exempted these upland peasants from the obligation to supply a wide range of other products. In 1752, Jacob Mossel reported that 2,600 *pikul* of pepper had been delivered in addition to 12,000 *pikul* of coffee, but the rising demand for the latter led to a drastic reduction – or complete abolition – of the compulsory delivery of other crops that had formerly fallen under the quota regulations, such as pepper, cotton and indigo. At the start of the eighteenth century, indigo had been high on the list of the Company's priority products (De Haan I 1910: 220-5). However, coffee soon became a monoculture that left the peasants no time for any other activity, except growing paddy for their own subsistence. Compared with the much more varied crop pattern that had existed earlier, this change signified a declining diversity in the agrarian economy. A clear indication of this contraction was the small number of local market places operating in the Priangan region at the end of the eighteenth century (De Haan I 1910: 400-1).

Imposing a tribute was of course not new. The court of Mataram demanded the delivery of a wide range of products from the Priangan, which varied widely from region to region. When it extended its authority over the region, the VOC made it clear that it intended to take over the sovereign rights of its predecessors. Local chiefs received orders to follow the instructions of the new rulers and subordination continued to form the basis for imposing obligations on the population. The annual ritual of bringing in 'muddy-footed Javanese' from the vicinity around Cirebon to do maintenance work on the on the canals and harbour of Batavia was justified by referring to similar corvee arrangements in former times. It is, however, doubtful whether this early-colonial claim on native labour power can be considered a continuation of the duties to which peasants had been subjected under the old regime, as they were now nominally rewarded for the work they had performed. Nevertheless, the costs to the VOC were low: the peasants were badly paid and only those who survived the harsh work

regime – sometimes no more than half of the total workforce – actually received payment (De Haan I 1910: 262). The term 'corvee services' is even less applicable to the work gangs, also procured in the surroundings of Cirebon by agents of the sugar mills around Batavia to cut and mill the cane produced. Though these seasonal labourers also received a wage for the work they performed, they had no say at all in the terms of their employment.

Coercion and desertion

A far heavier burden than these new ways of mobilizing labour was of course the obligation imposed on the peasants to cultivate certain crops, especially and increasingly as time passed, coffee. They were not only forced to grow the coffee, but also to deliver the beans to the VOC's warehouses and to accept whatever price the Company decided to pay for them – or at least whatever was left of it after the chiefs had deducted their share. Because of the trade monopoly imposed by the VOC, the peasants had no space at all to negotiate. By disallowing outsiders, and the Chinese in particular, access to the region, the Company usurped the market entirely (De Haan I 1910: 390). Forest patrols went around to enforce the ban and violators were arrested and, if they were lucky, kept in detention in chains (De Haan I 1910: 105). The region was almost hermetically sealed off. The closure of the Sunda lands was the consequence of a colonial policy initiated in the eighteenth century.

The VOC considered itself not only as the ruler but also as the owner of the land and its people and conducted business accordingly. But the levying of tribute should not be seen as holding on to old customs. The increased scale and intensity of the burden imposed on the peasants was not the only difference between the new and old regimes. They were now coerced to practise sedentary agriculture to enable the extensive cultivation of the crop that increasingly monopolized the VOC's attention. In De Haan's words: 'It was the cultivation of coffee that sealed the fate of nomadic peasants and forced them to live in permanent settlements' (De Haan I 1910: 16). The mandate entrusted to the native chiefs meant that they made peasants' access to land to cultivate food dependent on their willingness to fulfil the colonial obligations to grow and supply prescribed crops. Conversely, as Van Imhoff noted in a report of his journey through the Priangan in 1744, the laying out of the coffee gardens also helped to turn the nomadic rice growers into sedentary cultivators. Sundanese peasants were willing

to grow coffee, but only if they had enough *sawahs* to do so (De Haan I 1910: 371). The peasants were not only required to plant the coffee and deliver the dried beans to the designated collecting stations, but also to build warehouses, lay roads and perform all other kinds of labour on the VOC's orders. What was later referred to as cultivation services comprised both growing and delivering specified crops. On top of these came corvee services for their own chiefs, most important of which were relinquishing a share of their own rice harvest and tilling the lord's own fields, but they also included a wide variety of services in and around the patron's house. Lastly, the regents were also entitled to collect all kinds of taxes, including tolls, *pasar* fees, pass duties, a tax on slaughtering cattle or on marriages, etc., without having to account for them in any way at all. After all, such forms of income were part and parcel of what stubbornly came to be defined as 'self-government'.

Altogether, this meant that the peasants were burdened with a much heavier package of taxes and obligations than under the *ancien régime*. The difference in quantity was reflected in the quality. This change was related to the weakening of the peasants' bargaining power, already referred to above. The protest that this invoked did not receive much attention in colonial accounts and must be derived from indirect indications, such as the resistance that the Company experienced when collecting the tribute. As we have seen above, by the end of the eighteenth century, the volume of coffee supplied had expanded steadily. However, this increase did not occur gradually and in a controlled manner, but was subject to strong fluctuations. The periodic adjustments to the quotas imposed on the growers were less an indication of the VOC gaining a tighter grip on the production process than a response to the continually rising demand for coffee in faraway markets, where more people were now also developing a taste for this exotic new drink from afar. Management at arm's length may have been suitable in the early days of international trade, which focused on a limited volume of high-quality products, but proved to hamper the mobilization of mass quantities, even when supply had to be backed up by coercion. In practice, the VOC was unable to ensure that its orders were carried out adequately. Its incomplete control over the peasants, mediated by native chiefs, is reflected in the extremely volatile nature of coffee supplies between 1721 and 1800. The production records for this period, based on figures collected by De Haan (III 1912: 920-2), show that it was not until the latter years of the eighteenth century that a certain degree of stability emerged and the wildest fluctuations became a thing of the past (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Coffee supplied to the VOC by the lands and regencies under the control of Batavia, 1721-1800

Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul
1721	1,515	1731	–	1741	21,086	1751	9,022
1722	3,882	1732	–	1742	–	1752	11,738
1723	8,818	1733	–	1743	–	1753	18,063
1724	15,465	1734	45,096	1744	4,224	1754	15,870
1725	26,968	1735	20,848	1745	6,539	1755	14,068
1726	26,198	1736	29,827	1746	10,195	1756	20,015
1727	16,791	1737	28,698	1747	8,413	1757	20,922
1728	15,748	1738	43,480	1748	12,799	1758	16,023
1729	15,770	1739	23,292	1749	15,330	1759	14,468
1730	13,026	1740	40,925	1750	13,225	1760	11,191
Year	**Pikul**	**Year**	**Pikul**	**Year**	**Pikul**	**Year**	**Pikul**
1761	9,022	1771	24,374	1781	31,110	1791	49,562
1762	11,228	1772	15,258	1782	24,816	1792	72,983
1763	5,458	1773	25,479	1783	20,170	1793	86,686
1764	15,000	1774	22,301	1784	25,375	1794	67,875
1765	7,361	1775	16,375	1785	17,796	1795	65,866
1766	28,207	1776	30,275	1786	20,196	1796	57,769
1767	26,987	1777	24,935	1787	23,501	1797	81,986
1768	35,724	1778	22,444	1788	24,586	1798	56,178
1769	33,017	1779	26,923	1789	50,779	1799	44,062
1770	28,484	1780	32,409	1790	58,317	1800	62,764

Source: De Haan I 1910: 920-4

The Company directors in Batavia must have been anxious each year to see whether the harvest had increased, perhaps doubled or even more, or would perhaps be half or even less than the year before. Attributing this uncertainty solely to a lack of insight among the managers on the workfloor, while ignoring the very real resistance of the peasants, does not paint the whole picture. Opposition to the command economy took many forms, one of the most notable of which was land flight. Already at the start of the eighteenth century, hundreds of peasant families deserted to the inaccessible mountains in the south of the region, leaving dozens of abandoned settlements to the north. Many fled the highlands and hinterland of Cirebon in other directions and moved either to the nebulous zone around Batavia or found their way to Banten. At one point the population of the regency of Sumedang had declined by a third. Migration was a long-standing problem and early reports contain complaints about it, but the information reached

the VOC too little and too late. During his tour through the Priangan in 1744, Van Imhoff linked land flight to the excessive demands that chiefs imposed on their subjects. Elsewhere in his report he noted that many people fled to Banten because their burden of taxation was less excessive there. The same applied to flight from the lands under the Company's control to the principalities of Central Java. Sometimes, the cultivation of coffee or some other crop was introduced in an area where the poor soil offered few favourable prospects of a good harvest, simply to stop peasants from fleeing there from other regions that were already subject to forced cultivation.

Reports from the early eighteenth century and later show clearly that much of the peasant migration was motivated by attempts to escape the new regime of compulsory delivery of goods and services. The VOC did its utmost to limit the exodus. As described in the previous chapter, Jacobus Couper informed the regents as early as 1684 that they were not permitted to subordinate people or villages that were under the jurisdiction of other regencies. In 1693, the Company's agent in Tanjungpura ordered that anyone moving from one district to another should be sent back, an instruction that was extended to cover all the Priangan Regencies in 1697 (De Haan III 1912: 431-2). This instruction was reissued regularly in the following century, no longer purely to put a stop to the inconvenient tendency of peasants to defect to another lord but, by demanding unconditional and exclusive servitude to the regent in whose jurisdiction they lived, to ensure that they could not escape the system of forced cultivation. An order was introduced in 1728 to secure the continued cultivation of coffee and other crops by making desertion a criminal offence. Deserters were to be apprehended and returned to their masters, while chiefs who gave them refuge were also to be punished. Defaulting chiefs were dismissed on the spot, sent to the Resident in chains and exiled overseas to a location specified by the Governor-General and the VOC's High Command in Batavia (Hoadley 1994: 147). Sometimes a regent would submit a request allowing peasants arriving from elsewhere to stay and help grow the coffee (De Haan III 1912: 173). Such cases were often settled on an ad hoc basis, showing a clear conflict of interests between the place of origin and that of arrival. A resolution in 1778 accused regents and chiefs of transgressing the Company's orders. In their eagerness to give sanctuary to deserters and nomadic peasants, they caused great harm to the cultivation and delivery of the crops. The punishment for encouraging peasants to defect remained the same as half a century earlier. Deserters themselves were called to order by a form of corporal punishment referred to as 'a good whipping' (De Haan I 1910: 417). Recidivists were put in chains in their district of origin for six months.

The VOC refused to acknowledge that desertion and defection were a consequence of the system of forced cultivation. They attributed it to the footloose character of the Priangan peasants, who would up and leave, even abandoning their wife and children, at the slightest provocation. Perhaps they did not like maltreatment by their chief or had other objections that were evidence of their lack of discipline and unwillingness to lead a more regulated and settled life. Land flight, absconding to the mountainous upland beyond the reach of claims from higher up, is how Scott has characterized the footloose life and preference for swidden agriculture segments of the peasantry in Southeast Asia resorted to in their counter-strategy to avoid being governed and taxed in subaltern regimes of dependency (Scott 2009). The Company's complaints of such 'vagrancy' continued until well into the next century, showing that the policy of immobilization did not produce the expected results, despite the rigorous sanctions imposed on malefactors. The fiasco can partly be explained by the inaccessibility of the region, together with the Company's limited reach of control. In this light, it can be concluded that Mossel's estimate in 1754 that the Priangan lands had 31,479 inhabitants (Bijvoegsel beschrijving Soendasche eilanden 1781: 272, note c) is little more than a shot in the dark. Knowledge of the hinterland, as well as of the nature and size of its population, remained very superficial. The early expeditions sent out to learn more about these remote regions included land surveyors and map-makers but, notwithstanding all these efforts, such attempts initially had little success. Despite its strong words and sometimes equally strict sanctions, the Company remained floundering in a society that was inscrutable and offered its members a wide range of options for escape and evasion. The only way the VOC could gain control over peasant labour and deploy it for the forced delivery of goods and services, especially coffee, was to rely on the loyal collusion of the native chiefs. The following section examines to what extent this was a realistic proposition.

Indigenous management

The VOC employed the local chiefs as contractors doing the bidding of their Dutch superiors. They were held accountable for implementing the system of compulsory delivery of goods and services. The Company's officials had no direct contact with the peasants and were not interested in how the chiefs carried out the orders they received and handled the problems they encountered. It would nevertheless be incorrect to see this governance at

arm's length as a continuation of the old regime. The position of the chiefs had changed radically, and their role was substantially different from that of their predecessors. As before, they were subject to an absentee superior, but now their subordination was clearly, even primarily, economic in nature. The chiefs became the jobbers of the colonial mode of production. Like the peasants beneath them, chiefs of all ranks would be punished for violations of the cultivation regime, ranging from negligence to refusing to carry out orders from their superiors to outright resistance. The Company pursued a policy of zero tolerance to disobedience in any form. In De Haan's words, wherever coffee grew, the cane was there, too, at the ready (I 1910: 282).

Money was a much more positive incentive in obtaining the loyal cooperation of the chiefs and the people. The VOC used it so sparsely because it wished to earn as much as possible from coffee by minimizing the share of the proceeds that it passed on to the producers and their bosses. The main issue, of course, was how much the planters received for their labour. At first, the Sundanese peasants received nothing at all for the work they performed until the first harvest, i.e. four years after the trees were planted, not even an advance on what they would ultimately be paid. Throughout this period, the Company used the labour of the peasants for free. And when they did deliver the beans, the sources show that they were paid very little. The price cuts introduced shortly after the successful introduction of coffee cultivation have already been mentioned. The VOC proved very inventive in finding ways to cut its costs. The weight of a *pikul*, initially 125 pounds, was increased in a series of stages. In 1777, the term *bergse pikol* (mountain *pikul*) was introduced. This meant that the weight of a *pikul* varied from 200 to 300 pounds, depending on the regency, while regents continued to be rewarded according to the old measure of 146 pounds per *pikul*. As a result of this typical example of mercantile cunning, the payments to the peasants declined sharply. The regents received the old price since, without their cooperation, growing coffee would not have been possible. Company officials at all levels creamed off the surplus earned from this increase in the weight measure to fill their own pockets. This also explains why the weight of a *pikul* – always higher in the mountains than on the plains – varied according to the place of delivery. In addition, the VOC was very innovative in lowering the value of the money it used to pay for the coffee beans. In 1782, part of the payment was made in paper vouchers of little worth, and which were circulated little further than in Batavia. Much more harmful to the people of the Priangan was the circulation of low-quality farthings and other coins. After 1780, due to a shortage of copper money, coins known as '*bonken*' came into circulation. They were worth so little

that the peasants traded them for salt as soon as possible, which was a more valuable means of exchange. It can be concluded from this evidence that the gradual monetization of the indigenous economy took place at various distinct levels which were hardly interconnected, if at all.

The combination of punishment and reward was not enough to assure the VOC of a steadily growing supply of coffee from the Priangan region. The Company therefore gradually stepped up its supervision of the chiefs. A first step was the appointment, in the early eighteenth century, of a high-ranking official with the title Commissioner of Indigenous Affairs, later referred to simply as the Commissioner or Indigenous Commissioner (De Haan IV 1912: 1304). While the Governor-General primarily concerned himself with trade and focused his attention seawards, there was a growing need for someone below him stationed in the colonial headquarters to keep an eye on inland affairs from Batavia. Although a formal instruction was never issued for the Commissioner's portfolio, his mandate and the power attached to it increased rapidly. After 1730, all correspondence with the regents passed through his hands. He acted with a considerable degree of autonomy and took decisions befitting a position of high authority: changing the borders of regencies, granting exemptions from or enforcing cultivation systems in districts, opening up the hinterland to improve the infrastructure, etc. In 1745, an instruction was issued that when he went on tours outside Batavia – though not in the headquarters itself – he would be accorded full military honours. The upgrading of this office in the hierarchy of the VOC was undoubtedly related to the increasing significance of coffee. Initially, the Commissioner was also charged with maintaining law and order. He was assigned guards and native police constables, who were responsible for punitive operations. The transfer of crop cultivation from the coastal plain to the highlands meant a change not only in the Commissioner's area of command, but also in how he worked. He and his staff no longer patrolled the lowlands, but went to the highlands in person to ensure that the orders issued to the regents regarding the delivery of coffee and other commodities were being followed to the letter.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Commissioner rarely dared to venture outside the immediate environs of Batavia. Later, he would occasionally undertake short tours to the interior, which were made more difficult by the bad state of the roads. Rather than travel by coach, he would go on horseback or be carried in a sedan chair. There were a handful of European agents who stayed permanently in the hinterland to oversee delivery of the colonial tribute. The original intention was to have one of these 'coffee sergeants' in each regency, but in practice this rarely happened.

G.G. Van der Parra, seated in a palanquin on a visit to Sukahati or Heart's Desire, the corralled residence of Bogor's *temanggung* (drawing by Rach 1772). The buildings to the left are most probably sheds for storing coffee beans.

Source: Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia Collection, Jakarta

As their name suggests, they were lower-ranking officers in the VOC's military branch. It was not until 1790 that they were made into full civil servants and given the title of bookkeeper. These inspectors, who operated close to the workfloor and acted as the Company's eyes and ears, were in turn closely watched by a small number of native overseers to make sure they didn't engage in any underhand business with the regents, for example not delivering all harvested and processed coffee beans to the Company's warehouses or tampering with weights or payments. The Commissioner received only a meagre salary from the Company, from which he also had to pay his small staff of inspectors and guards. And yet his income rose to an astronomical level, due to a system of reward that was customary in the early-colonial era. Most of his wealth stemmed from his cut in cultivation and trade, such as a commission on the purchase of coffee and the sale of other goods, especially opium, from taxes on markets and presentations. He also received large sums of money from regents and lower chiefs who depended on his goodwill. The landed gentry did nothing more than what they were accustomed to doing under the emperor of Mataram: presenting gifts to mark appointments or promotions, at New Year, when visiting

Batavia, or to accompany requests for favours, in short a mixed bag of tributes and bribes. The regents were tied hand and foot to the Commissioner by the advances they received. As early as 1741, the regent of Cianjur authorized his patron in the higher echelons of the VOC to conduct all his financial transactions, a precedent that was followed by the other regents in later years. It was not unusual for the Commissioner to make payments on behalf of the regent without the latter's knowledge. A newly appointed regent was not issued with proof of appointment until he had undertaken in writing to take on the debt of his predecessor and to stand as guarantor for the commitments of the other chiefs. In this light, it is not surprising that a large part of the money required to pay for the products acquired by coercion never left Batavia. The regent was the actual supplier of the coffee. Generally he would receive an advance payment, based on a calculation made in the first half of the eighteenth century, equal to about a third of the ultimate price. He would spend half of the remaining balance, the amount the Company was willing to pay up in the end, on transport costs, while the other half was intended for the peasant producers. This formula would hardly change in the years that followed, nor would the unwritten rule that those at the bottom of the chain received what was left after all other payments had been made. Occasionally, as in 1777, the entire coffee revenue disappeared immediately into the pockets of the Commissioner as payment for advances and interest on loans.

The figure of the Commissioner fitted perfectly into the tableau of eighteenth-century Batavia as the headquarters of the VOC. High-ranking Company officials lived, like the high nobility of Java, a life of pomp and circumstance, with country houses and stables and an extensive entourage of quartermasters, servants and slaves who accompanied them when they travelled. All this took place at the expense of the local people, partly because these excursions entailed tournaments, hunting parties and festive receptions, for which the local chiefs and their clients had to supply a wide variety of goods and services: accommodation, horses, food, drink, women – and all in abundance. Nepotism was rife and open. Promotion was possible without the protection of a prominent figure, but came more easily if you were from good, preferably aristocratic, stock back in Holland and could use the contacts that came with such a respectable background. Despite its initially rather low ranking in the hierarchy, the position of Commissioner became one of the most lucrative jobs that the Governor-General had at his disposal. Once appointed from among the latter's circle of close favourites, the newcomer could soon loosen his ties of dependency and establish an almost unassailable position. It is not an exaggeration to

see the Commissioner as the white *patih* of the Governor-General. He was the one who actually exercised the Company's authority in all interactions with his native counterparts. His office, with all its powers, was strongly patrimonial and thrived in a tribute-based society. The Commissioner held court in the capital. His desire for prestige, the display of ceremony that surrounded him, his gracious acceptance of the homage and the gifts of the chiefs that came to visit him, as they used to visit the court at Mataram, were all the features of a system of neo-patrimonialism that formed the facade behind which the tributary mode of production was developed and refined.

The social proximity between the VOC officials and the regents by no means meant that the former considered the local chiefs their social equals. They treated them with disdain and a lack of respect, saw them as barely civilized and accused them of repressing and exploiting their people. The fact that the system of tribute forced them to act in this way was completely ignored. An instruction from 1778 tried to put a stop to the worst forms of extortion by paying the coffee growers directly and on the spot, but little came of this in practice. The coffee sergeant, who usually had no command at all of the local language and had never seen a coffee tree before being appointed, kept a close eye on the regent's actions. In theory, the regent ranked higher than the sergeant, known in the interior as *Toewan Mandor*, but the chief was often treated as though he were the inferior of the two. Although it gradually became less acceptable to refer to the natives, including those with positions of status, as 'black dogs', the tone remained objectionable, right up to the highest level (De Haan I 1910: 305-6). And this browbeating was not only verbal. While on tour, the Commissioner would not shy away from giving a district chief a good dressing down, which included kicking, slapping and beating, and on one occasion the regent's substitute was put in the stocks. Whether it was also normal to treat the common people with equal roughness is not reported. They remained outside the field of vision of the small number of Europeans who had contact with the society they had colonized. In De Haan's words: 'The eyes of the Dutch officials looked out over the squatting Sundanese to the coffee trees beyond' (I 1910: 306).

Despite the Company controlling the Priangan from early on, its knowledge of the social order in the region increased only at a snail's pace. The principle of indirect rule that formed the basis for exploiting the land and its people, meant that the interior remained unfamiliar and alien territory until deep into the eighteenth century. After the outer frontiers had been demarcated, the land was rapidly appropriated, but it took a much greater effort to gain a grip on the social ties that bound the colonized population. The Company had hardly any understanding of the peasant order, having

no desire at all to descend to this inferior level of society. Delegating the collection of the tribute to the rural gentry, however, made it crucial to gather strategic information on the composition, background and *modus operandi* of the Priangan elite. This 'intelligence' was acquired in practice and was not a goal itself, but served solely to facilitate the Company's primary objective: the forced cultivation and delivery of colonial commodities. It soon became clear that the *patih* was the pivotal figure in the economy of the regency. As the direct executor of the regent's orders, this official in effect managed the work performed in his master's service. This early insight led the Company, in 1706, to reserve the right to appoint and dismiss the regent's right-hand man. The VOC's officials, however, continued to lack guidelines to help them navigate through the tangle of main chiefs and minor heads that made up the regent's apparatus – *toemenggoeng*, *kepala tjoetak*, *ngabehi*, *demang*, *oemboel*, *patinggi*, *jaksa*, *mantri*, etc. – and they soon lost their way. The names of course held the key to understanding how indigenous governance was organized, but for outsiders it remained a mystery who did what, how far their authority extended, and how they ranked in relation to each other. The confusion partly originated in the fact that power and authority were not exercised along lines of territoriality. The agents in the Company's outposts were further hindered by their inability to interact with the people. Candidates were not required to have even a minimum command of the language. More often than not, the reverse was true: chiefs were expected to have a reasonable knowledge, if not of Dutch, then of *pasar* Malay. The instructions forbidding desertion and defection, for example, were published only in these two languages. But the Priangan aristocracy spoke mainly Sundanese or a debased form of Javanese. It is not difficult to imagine the communication problems that this must have caused.

Under the Company's control

In 1744, the regent received an order to inspect his territory 'in person or by his Pepattij' once a year and to submit a report to the Commissioner (De Haan IV 1912: 334). As the locus of colonial management was gradually transferred from the regency to the districts, inspection duties were also increasingly focused at this level. An instruction from 1778 ordered the inspectors to monitor the payments to the coffee growers (four *rijksdaalders* per *bergse pikol*), draw up a monthly statement of production figures, conduct a survey of the number of villages, dwellings and inhabitants involved in the cultivation of compulsory crops and the transport of the tribute

to the Company's warehouses, send deserters arriving from elsewhere back where they came from, report immediately on the danger of harvest failure, and so on (De Haan II 1911: 592-5). The transfer of the bulk of the administration to the lower echelons was jeopardized by the tendency of lower-ranking chiefs to remain in the close proximity of their immediate superiors as long and as often as possible. In 1744, for example, some 60 to 70 of these minor chiefs resided at the *kraton* of the regency of Cianjur, from where they issued orders to their substitutes. The highest VOC official to encounter them engaging in this old custom while on a tour of the interior ordered them to visit their own *cutak* (district) at least four times a year, also commanding the regent or his substitute to visit all the districts once a year (De Haan II 1911: 502). All these memoranda were to no avail for the time being. Half a century later, the district chiefs were instructed to be present in their *cutak* at least twice a year, when the coffee was planted and harvested, and to accompany the inspector during his annual inspection tour. In 1802, these measures reached their logical conclusion in the form of an instruction that the district chiefs should henceforth live permanently in their own *cutak*. As with earlier notifications from the commanding heights, the chiefs continued to avoid complying with them for many years after they came into force (De Haan I 1910: 360). This meant that, even at the end of the eighteenth century, the Company's supervision of coffee production extended just about down to district level and certainly no further downwards.

The policy of territorial demarcation also brought about changes in the hierarchical order. A clear line of command developed from the regent down to the coffee planters. The system of governance that the VOC tried to introduce allowed no overlapping competences or a fusion of these differentiated, but non-synchronized channels of authority. The various chiefs were now given more discrete tasks that were ranked vertically, from high to low. The traditional right of the landed gentry to transfer their loyalty to another patron – or at least, to threaten to do so – also came to an end. As with the peasants, the Company wanted subordination to be seen as a relationship that remained fixed and could not be terminated or transferred. As a total ban proved impossible, a rule was introduced in 1728, by way of compromise, determining that clients who left their patrons would henceforth have to forfeit all their possessions (including their land and their own clients) to their former lord (Hoadley 1994: 147). It was a meaningless concession, as there was no point in defecting to another patron without taking one's own clients. After all, it meant leaving behind the capital on which the economic power, political clout and social

status of the departing chief depended. Initially, the gentry undoubtedly did little more than take cognizance of these regulations. In the long term, however, the restrictive nature of the new configurations must have caused them to lose much of their room for manoeuvre. The ambiguous, fluid ties they enjoyed with various overlords were replaced by a more regimented top-down administration. On the other hand, the new situation had the major benefit that it assured them much greater security and stability. They no longer had to be afraid of rivals undermining their power base by encouraging clients to desert or competing for the favours of the same patron. This explains why high dignitaries from Cirebon petitioned the Company in the mid-eighteenth century to deprive the sultans of the right to dismiss them (*ibid.*: 125).

Structuring the administrative hierarchy along territorial lines strengthened the Company's grip on the population of the Priangan and its productive capacity. Sedentarization, as observed above, made it easier to subordinate the peasantry to the colonial tax regime. One obstacle to achieving this, apart from the stubbornness with which the peasants clung on to their footloose way of life, was that the region was not densely populated. In its unremitting attempts to increase the supply of compulsory goods, the Company sought ways of raising the colonial tribute at the foot of society. It did this by coercing not only the sedentary peasants (*bumi*) in an area to cultivate specific crops, but also newcomers (*numpang*) who had come there to settle. The latter were seen as peasants who had run away from somewhere else to escape the excessive demands of a lord. While their new patron laid claim to the *numpang's* labour power, allowing them to cultivate his paddy fields in exchange for a share of the harvest for themselves, he did not use these new clients to grow compulsory crops (De Haan I 1910: 362-3). The Company's decision to include the *numpang* in the system of forced cultivation had a far-reaching social impact, and was made with that intention in mind. Its aim, after all, was to spread the burden of forced cultivation equally among all the peasants. This configuration no longer left room for the heads of the composite households (*cacah*), who were obliged to pay tax to the local chief unit and, therefore, ultimately constituted part of the retinue of the regent. Under the new regime, the complex composite households were split up into nuclear peasant households, all with equal obligations. In 1785, Leendert Rolff – who had been appointed Commissioner in the previous year – proposed that 'each household, whether they were *numpang* or *bumi*, in the Priangan' be involved equally in forced cultivation. He included this provision in the first article of his Coffee Instruction, issued in 1789 (De Haan IV 1912: 417-8; II 1911: 631-43). Whether it was actually put

into practice and, equally importantly, whether the definition of the peasant order on which it was based was an accurate reflection of the situation in reality are questions that we will return to later.

Rolff was most probably encouraged to draw up his guidelines for the cultivation of coffee by a missive from the '*Heren XVII*' (the VOC's Amsterdam Board of Directors) in 1788 'that Javanese coffee cannot be cultivated or delivered too much'. Rolff's instruction specified how to choose the land, how to plant the trees and maintain them while they were growing, and lastly how to pick and dry the beans. He wrote the instruction on the basis of a questionnaire distributed among inspectors and chiefs. Their answers, which reflected prevailing practices, were used to draw up the guidelines. He certainly also made use of the impressions he had acquired himself during a long tour of the Priangan some years before to acquaint himself with the region, which his predecessor had not taken the trouble to do. He was driven to write the instruction by his intention to improve the cultivation methods he encountered. At the end of the report of his tour, Rolff decried the bad state of the trees almost everywhere he went, and concluded that the regents were not following their orders and deserved to be punished by way of example. The instruction specified that coffee should be grown as close as possible to the planters' homes and they were ordered to plant as many new trees as possible until they had a thousand trees a year to tend. They were also instructed to plant a hedge around the coffee plantations, to prevent the trees being damaged by cattle. The ground between the trees had to be raked four times a year to keep it free of weeds and *dadap* trees were to be planted to provide shade for the young coffee shrubs. These new requirements made it clear that coffee was no longer a crop the peasants could grow in their own yards. In the first two years, they were allowed to grow rice in between the young saplings, followed by a second crop. The beans were still dried at the peasant's home. The regents and lower chiefs were obliged to pay for the beans immediately on delivery and to exempt their subordinates from other services as much as possible during the busy harvest season. Lastly, the European overseers had to inspect the crops from time to time, using horses and manpower supplied by the regents. Rolff had the instruction translated into Javanese and ordered it to be announced *verbatim* at the headquarters of the regencies during his subsequent inspection tour. As with all measures introduced during the eighteenth century to promote the collection of the tribute, issuing this instruction was much easier in theory than in practice. This first attempt to design a complete and thorough cultivation manual for producing this compulsory commodity was, however, even more interesting than the

inadequate level of compliance. A similar manual had been prepared in 1778 for cultivating and processing indigo, but the instruction for coffee in particular coincided with an enormous leap forwards in the volume produced. This substantial increase, however, appears to have been more due to the steadily expanding mass mobilization of peasant labour to cultivate coffee than to any improvement in the knowledge of the inspectors. A high-ranking Company official announced confidently at the end of the eighteenth century that as much coffee could be produced as there were ships made available to transport it to the metropolis.

Tardy population growth

A measure of the success of the new approach was a rise in production to 86,000 *pikul* in 1793. But intensification of the coffee cultivation was accompanied by persistent land flight. Spreading the work among more people than before could not prevent the burden increasing for everyone. Desertion was sometimes the only possible option remaining, and the peasants repeatedly and in large numbers resorted to this solution. Others left because the *sawahs* they relied on to grow their food had been requisitioned to plant coffee (De Haan I 1910: 159). The increase in production towards the end of the eighteenth century would not have been possible without the introduction of forced cultivation in parts of the Priangan which, until then, had been spared. In 1808, Lawick reported that, as soon as the population of Tjidamar in Sukapura heard that coffee was to be planted in their district, they left immediately without even starting to prepare the land. The following year, he reported that, in the Cirebon Priangan Regencies, some of the peasants used to move temporarily to another regency (where, as *numpang*, they were exempt from the forced cultivation) when the planting season arrived, only to return when it was over (De Haan III 1912: 629). In some places, like the Jampangs in south Priangan, coffee was introduced on ground that, although it was not very suitable for growing the crop, it stopped runaway peasants from settling there.

Around 1720, the Priangan could still be considered a frontier region, with no more than a little above one tenth of all land taken up for cultivation one way or the other. In 1777, the population was allegedly 55,000, rose to 206,494 in 1796, and was set at 150,822 in 1808 (De Haan I 1910: 953). The first headcount is as unreliable as the other two. Even the suggestion that the highest figure is closest to reality is pure speculation. Due to a lack of adequate knowledge and access, the VOC's statistical records at

that time were so incomplete that even a rough estimate of the true size of the population was impossible. They were not censuses in the literal sense of the word, but aggregated accounts submitted by the chiefs at the Company's request. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that, until the end of the eighteenth century, demographic growth occurred very slowly, and was accompanied by strong variations in population density in the different parts of the region. After the initial arrival of colonists from the already densely populated coastal plain of Central Java, there was no influx of people from elsewhere. It seems fair to assume that the heavy colonial tribute discouraged people from settling in the relatively thinly settled hilly tracts behind Batavia. Other factors undoubtedly also played a role, including several years of high mortality, caused by epidemics. A report from 1757/58 notes that, because of the break-out of a kind of plague 'whole *negorijen* had practically died out', which had a very detrimental effect on the supply of Company products. A year later, the regent of Parakanmuncang reported that 425 of the 1,000 households under his charge had been wiped out within a period of six months. Vaccination against cowpox, started in the early nineteenth century, brought this disease under control. According to Pieter Engelhard, who became Commissioner in 1804, the campaign encountered difficulties at first, as the people fiercely resisted being vaccinated. His assistant Lawick used the mass exodus of the population on this ground as an excuse to suspend the campaign until a later date. Epidemics of course not only claimed many victims in the Priangan; elsewhere, too, demographic growth was checked by years of high mortality. In sparsely populated areas like the highlands of Sunda, recurring plagues hampered the growth of the workforce, which was required to increase production whenever the colonial authorities issued instructions to that effect.

An explanation for the persistent low population density in the Priangan Regencies would, however, be incomplete without mentioning another cause: the unremitting attempts of local chiefs in particular to keep as many of their subordinate peasants as possible, if not all of them, out of sight, so as to exempt them from the forced cultivation of coffee. We will see later to what extent they succeeded in this endeavour, but their actions meant that the colonial records underestimated the true size of the population. The Company was aware of the discrepancy and did everything in its power to expose this hidden pool of labour. In 1805, Lawick, now acting Commissioner, wrote that the population was twice as large as had been reported. Similar observations can be found in many other sources from this period (De Haan IV 1912: 542). The implication was that the cultivation of coffee could and must expand. That did not occur immediately, as the

eagerness with which Rolff had set about his work made way in the years that followed for laxity among native managers and failing supervision by the Company's agents. To make their lives easier, inspectors issued instructions to plant trees along the roadside, whether the soil was suitable or not, so that they could conduct their inspections as they rode past, not even having to dismount from their horses. It still happened that peasants were instructed to plant coffee in their *sawahs* and to set out new paddy fields elsewhere. Pieter Engelhard's travel journal in 1802 also mentions the requisitioning of *sawahs* to grow coffee, which most certainly must have involved the use of force. One inspector noted that regents considered it beneath their dignity to accompany him on his inspections, as they were obliged to do. In response to the disappointing annual report submitted by Commissioner Nicolaus Engelhard in 1799, he had to give the chiefs a serious dressing down about their failure to fulfil their duties. The regent of Cianjur, one of the worst culprits, was warned that he must mend his ways or measures would be taken to punish him. Failure to abide by the cultivation ordinances was given as the reason for dismissing the regents of Batulajang and Parakanmuncang in 1802. Tough measures were indispensable in reaching the increased target of 100,000 *pikul* per year. The newly installed Commissioner Pieter Engelhard – a cousin of his predecessor, who had interceded on his behalf – was given Lawick as his deputy in 1802 to cope with the increased pressure of work.

Tying the peasants to the land, their compulsory involvement in the cultivation of crops for export, the ban on deserting their place of residence or transferring their servitude to another patron, confining the chiefs in a more streamlined bureaucratic hierarchy – all of these measures had the same goal: to raise the tribute. Tightening the tributary screw was undoubtedly successful, increasingly so as time passed. This does not mean, however, that those who were the victims of this early-colonial mode of production did not resist fiercely and persistently at all levels. The increased pressure applied after 1785 led immediately to an exodus from the Priangan to the lands surrounding Batavia to escape the 'intolerable burdens and obligations' (De Haan I 1910: 379). The Company prepared itself for collective resistance to the strict regime in the Priangan itself, but the isolation of the region worked in its favour. Agitators could easily be traced and rendered harmless. The Company's agents focused particularly on tracking down followers of Islam (De Haan I 1910: 433).

But could the VOC be assured of the compliance and loyalty of the Priangan chiefs? After all, the native gentry had concluded an alliance with the Company and the nobility could consider itself obliged to defend

the economic interests of their alien masters to the best of their ability in exchange for generous revenues as well as protection – and even consolidation – of their power. Whether they actually fully complied with all they had to do is highly disputable. The chiefs were not only differently ranked but also operated in circuits that were distinct from each other. The essence of their subordination was expressed in displays of servitude and in the compulsory delivery of commodities to the Company. In Batavia, the highest among them – the regents – had to show themselves regularly at the 'court' of the VOC, as befits vassals, to demonstrate their humility and submission. A code of conduct for local chiefs was never written up, they had to make do with the coffee instruction. The chiefs displayed their eminence with shows of pomp and circumstance (De Haan I 1910: 350). Their conduct may have appeared similar to that of their predecessors in the pre-colonial era, but their demonstrations of affluence were much more opulent than their forefathers had ever achieved. The coffee money, or rather the credit that they enjoyed in exchange for delivering this commodity, gave them the opportunity to excessive displays of extravagance that soon earned them the name of parvenus. During their stays in Batavia – which they sometimes stretched out to several months – the overpaid regents would do their utmost to outdo each other in shows of splendour. The regent of Cianjur used to ride around in a gilded coach. These 'shopaholic' *grand seigneurs* would pay extortionate prices for valuable goods. When they returned to their regencies, they would take opium, tobacco and textiles with them, which they would then sell on to local chiefs. At home, in the headquarters of their regencies, they may have lived a little more simply, but here too they were at the hub of power and wealth, elevated far above the peasant folk. The Company was dependent on the landed gentry's influence on the population as a whole both for its legitimacy and to set up the tributary system. The chiefs were nevertheless treated with little respect by the VOC officials. As already observed, they were considered inferior to their European bosses. Behind this facade of disdain, however, lurked a fear and uncertainty of having insufficient control over the chiefs' actions. This suspicion could lead to measures intentionally aimed at damaging them in some way, such as forcing them to continue growing unprofitable crops, as a lesson in obedience. So as not to become prisoners of their allies, the VOC pursued a policy of divide and rule. The contact between the regents was reputed to be formal, measured and cool, not in the last instance because the Company wanted it that way. It did not shy away from breeding envy and animosity among the chiefs (De Haan I 1910: 343, 357).

In the late eighteenth century, there was a discussion about whether the moment had come to rescind the decision to place coffee cultivation under indigenous management. Sebastiaan Nederburgh, sent to Batavia by the VOC as Commissioner-General to come up with proposals for how to proceed further, made it known in his report in 1796 – which was probably ghost-written by Nicolaus Engelhard – that governing the Priangan Regencies and taxing the peasants was currently costing the Company nothing. This money-wise conclusion put an end to any further discussion on alternatives. Even the costs (and incomes) of the inspectors, the Commissioner and his staff, were not borne by the Company itself. While the VOC did reward the chiefs for their collusion in coffee production, the price paid for their services was completely out of proportion with the profits that the VOC enjoyed from the subsequent trade. Even after coffee had been upgraded from luxury good to mass commodity, profit margins remained exceptionally high. The commission paid to the regents for their mediation brought them wealth and an opulent lifestyle. But they lost their fortunes just as easily as they made them through the excessive financial manipulations of the highest-ranking Company officials. The regents, placed under the tutelage of the Company were only appointed if they paid off the debts of their predecessors, and had to act as guarantors for each other. But no matter how detrimental this deceit must have been for their willingness to meet the Company's demands, the treatment meted out to the chiefs was many times preferable to what the peasants could expect. Lack of information makes it impossible to determine whether they saw the cultivation of coffee as unpaid corvee services. In a memorandum from 1804, Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp expressed an opinion that many before and after him were to share: 'All the coffee beans picked by the Javanese must be supplied at a low price or, as is widely acknowledged, for nothing' (De Haan III 1912: 704).

Tackling 'cultivation delinquency'

Because the Company refused to pay a reasonable price for the coffee, the planters were tempted not to surrender some or all of their harvest by throwing away or burying the beans, so avoiding the recurring and tedious journeys to the warehouses. Sometimes they would sell the coffee clandestinely to merchants who were willing to pay more than the Company. This evasion of the VOC's monopoly first of all affected the chiefs, from whom the peasants kept their illegal transactions secret. These practices were

mentioned as early as 1727, almost immediately after the first radical price cut. Yet the chiefs themselves were even more inventive than the peasants in ensuring that not all the coffee they had collected actually reached the Company's warehouses directly. Many loads switched owners on the way, often more than once, and the nearer they got to the coast, the higher the price the buyers were prepared to pay. If a regent failed to deliver the quantities that were expected of him, he or his subordinates were soon suspected of doing business with private traders. To combat these practices, the Company decided that no one should be permitted in the Priangan who did not belong there. The measure was a logical extension of the forced cultivation and delivery of coffee, but was presented as expressing the Company's desire to protect the simple and honest inhabitants from 'bad external influences'. The ban on 'strangers' in the region applied in the first instance to Chinese merchants who, as elsewhere, acted as intermediaries between the Company and the local people. They would buy the coffee up at their own cost and risk, but also operated as agents for European landlords living close to Batavia or – a better kept secret – Company officials. The inhabitants of the Priangan were also not permitted to leave their settlements. Growing or transporting the coffee were the only excuses they had not to be where they belonged: at home. They were not allowed to travel without a written permit issued at the office of the residency or by a chief. Failure to produce this pass on demand was punished by a lashing with a cane or a few days in the stocks. More serious offences like stealing cattle or coffee would mean a year in chains. There was little opportunity for anything other than growing your own food and the compulsory crop, and performing corvee services for your chief. These rigorous restrictions explain why there was little trade in the Priangan other than transactions with the Company and why there were almost no *pasars* in the region. Whatever non-local goods were available were brought back by the drivers of the pack animals that had taken the coffee to the warehouses at the frontiers, where petty traders offered goods such as textile or ironware that were in demand in the interior.

The peasants complained that the obligation to plant new trees each year left them insufficient time to maintain the standing plantations regularly and properly, but to no avail. A proposal in 1802 to reduce the number of trees per household to 500 was rejected but, again in 1808, Lawick did acknowledge that the number of trees that had to be planted had risen to an unbearable level. It had been established earlier that expansion of coffee cultivation to all regencies had led to a fall rather than a rise in production. 'The people flee, desert and defect from regions where they are placed

under such excessive pressure,' he reported to the Deputy Commissioner. He warned that adhering overly strictly to the demand that each household should maintain 1,000 trees a year would lead to large-scale desertion and revolt. This burden had become more onerous since Nicolaus Engelhard had announced in 1795 that the ban on deserting to escape the obligation to grow coffee also affected *numpang* households. When this instruction was first introduced in 1739, it applied only to landowning peasants, in light of the custom that landless peasants were exempt from the tribute. As we have seen, this was no longer the case from 1789 and extending the ban on desertion or defection to the landless helped include them in the system of forced cultivation. As before, the chiefs did all they could to expand their clientele, but this was no longer driven by the desire to steal a march on their rivals in terms of power and prestige, but to enable them to fulfil the Company's demand for coffee, coffee and more coffee. Sealing off the highlands as a sort of reservation and forcing the inhabitants to stay put were the main instruments used by the Company to collect the colonial tribute. What started as a free trade transaction in the early eighteenth century ended up as a system of forced cultivation and delivery. The chronicler of this regime described how the peasants were driven by fear of punishment and the chiefs by fear of their superiors, and how the whole system of cultivation prevailed because no one had the power to resist it. The violence used to keep the population under control remained outside the Company's field of vision, as it had no direct contact with the workfloor. Nevertheless, Nicolaus Engelhard spoke of the need for 'continual punishment' to get the peasants to work and keep them working. We know more about the pressure exerted on the chiefs to combat 'cultivation delinquency'. Even when these offences had been committed by their subordinates, the Commissioner and his overseers did not shy away from caning the managers of the coffee businesses, putting them in the stocks for days or months, or sentencing them to long periods in chains. As the highest chiefs, regents faced dismissal and exile for serious and persistent neglect of duty. Was the exercise of all this violence not excessive, even in the context of the times? Nicolaus Engelhard – who was by no means severe compared to the other Commissioners – expressed the certainty that no native would ever plant coffee without being forced to do so. In this way, what was actually a consequence of a ruthless regime was also identified as its cause and justification. The refusal to pay the peasants for their work gradually became standard practice in the eighteenth century and was also legitimized with hindsight as a continuation of the pre-colonial system of tribute.

Every expression of concern would almost automatically end with the argument that there was simply no other choice. The Sundanese were seen as naturally lazy and slothful; in Engelhard's words to Nederburgh, they were capable of 'no labour of any kind other than what they saw as absolutely necessary to meet their basic needs' (De Haan IV: 732). Left to his own devices, the Priangan peasant was completely unprepared to do anything more than he had to. That could only be achieved by subjecting him to strict control and discipline. From this perspective, coercion was a possibly regrettable but unfortunately necessary part of a long civilizing mission. In the final instance, the chronicler of this period shared this conclusion regarding the forced cultivation of coffee. In an economic sense, the introduction of the system was a great step forwards which the population may have taken reluctantly but which also put a stop to the under-utilization of the forces of production which held the Priangan back in its development. As late as the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial archivist De Haan assessed the impact of the Priangan system with striking light-heartedness: certainly, the coercion was severe, but for the native population compliance with the coffee regime meant merely a loss of leisure time, a change to which native life would duly become accustomed (De Haan I 1910: 148). Whether this is really true will become clear below as we explore the eclipse of the VOC and the transfer of power to the officials of the colonial state around the end of the eighteenth century.

III From trading company to state enterprise

Clashing interests

There was clearly no organized resistance to the VOC's domination and the system of compulsory cultivation and delivery. However, this does not mean that the landed gentry of the Priangan gave their full cooperation to the new regime. The regents and, through them, the lower chiefs were paid commissions for their mediation, but not generously enough for money to have been their only incentive. Most of them accumulated an enormous debt to their benefactors in Batavia. Political coercion, or the threat of it, was potentially a more important motive for collaborating. The annual appearance of the regents at the colonial headquarters gave added gloss to their superiors' power and was intended to reaffirm the chiefs' sense of dependence. Although this arrangement offered them no opportunity to display their own grandeur, once they had returned to their home bases in the hinterland, the regents no longer acted as the eager jobbers that the VOC wanted them to be. Far removed from their superiors in Batavia, they had wide-ranging powers which they could exercise with little fear of being checked up on. The Company had no desire to concern itself deeply or constantly with indigenous affairs. This reluctance even took on the form of antipathy, caused not only by a complete lack of interest but also by a blissful ignorance of the way indigenous society was structured and organized.

Early-colonial reports emphasized how the feudal lifestyle of the landed gentry conflicted with the Company's economic interests (De Haan I, 1910: 356). It is tempting to suggest a deep contrast between the contract-driven thinking of the trading company and the primary concern with status among the Priangan chiefs, the former concerned with growing coffee and the latter with hunting parties. But the divergence in aims and interests denies the many nuances on both sides. I have referred earlier to the lifestyle of the VOC directors in Batavia, which in a number of ways resembled that of the landed gentry and could easily be classified as neo-feudal. As for the regents, there has been little attention to the way in which they and the chiefs below them manifested themselves as economic entrepreneurs. There are indications that the landed gentry in the Sunda lands, as elsewhere on Java, played an important role in

trade and economic activity until the Company cut them off from these direct sources of power and wealth. Above all, they continued to be actively involved in the laying out and cultivation of new paddy fields. The steady conversion of dry land into irrigated fields often took place, as in former times, at the initiative and under the supervision of higher or lower patrons who belonged to the landed elite. The cultivation work itself was conducted by their clients among the peasant population who were entitled to till the new *sawahs* in exchange for a share of the fruits of their labour. Alongside the coffee production chain, with its managerial network extending across the rural landscape, there was also a distinct chain of production for paddy, over which the Company had no authority whatsoever and which continued to be organized completely outside its control. This explains why early-colonial accounts contain little or no information on how paddy cultivation was organized, how it gradually expanded and how supra-local chiefs requisitioned a share of the harvest. This lack of attention also applies to the involvement of Islamic clerics in agricultural affairs. Their active role in the daily work of the peasants would not come to light until much later.

The regents and the chiefs below them had many other sources of income, the nature and scale of which the Company had little insight into. According to the doctrine of non-intervention in indigenous affairs these were customary forms of tribute based on the servitude of the population to the chiefs that continued under the new regime. It was considered improper to abolish them or take them over. That also applied to the head tax, one of these old forms of tribute which the chiefs may have used to appropriate a considerable share of the payment the peasants received for growing the coffee. Lastly, the regents received income from the modest trade that developed in their regions, earning commissions from the monthly *pasar* and selling goods from Batavia to the local people, directly or through their agents. Sometimes the regent himself would bring these goods back in his caravan when returning from his annual visit to the colonial headquarters. I mention all these activities not only to correct the view that the Priangan regents were primarily or even exclusively concerned with indulging in ostentatious leisure, hunting and engaging in other feudal pastimes. More important is the conclusion that the economic interests of the regents conflicted, rather than coincided, with the expansion of coffee cultivation. In the eyes of the Company's accountants, the regents' attempts to exempt their clients partially or even completely from compulsory coffee cultivation was evidence of their non-economic mentality.

> The greater the numbers of these unproductive dependants, the greater the pomp and ceremony. That is why the main *negorij*, which was teeming with such idle servants, not only of the Regent but also of the District chiefs and other lesser officials, usually fell short of the standard norms of morality. (De Haan I, 1910: 366)

The fact that there were always so many people hanging around the regent's *kraton* and that no chief went anywhere without being accompanied by a whole entourage, was a source of great irritation to their colonial masters. But even more frustrating, of course, was that so many peasant clients who should have been working to raise the colonial tribute were used exclusively to work in the *sawah kaprabon*, the paddy fields owned by the chiefs themselves. Only with 'horrendous threats' did Rolff succeed in urging the regents to include the previously exempt *numpang* in the system of compulsory cultivation (De Haan I, 1910: 133). In the reports on the size of the population that they had to submit periodically, the chiefs probably only listed the class customarily subject to servitude: the peasant-owners. The difficulties involved in holding the regents accountable for producing and delivering the volume of coffee required eventually led the VOC to take action. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, it transferred primary responsibility for supervising the coffee growers from the regents to the district chiefs. This new policy was laid down officially in a resolution in 1790.

> The aforementioned *cutak* chiefs are also primarily responsible for the neglect of the coffee plantations and thus are obliged, on occasion that the neglect is the result of the extortions of the direct producers, to remonstrate them; if in the reverse case, that is if such is concealed, by its discovery [they] are to be considered and punished as accomplices and supporters. (Hoadley 1994: 162)

This forced the regents back, even more than before, into a position of mainly decorative significance, a demotion defended by reference to their 'despotic capriciousness'. An alternative would have been to expand the number of European inspectors, but this was probably not even considered because of the costs involved. The indigenous chiefs received no stipend and the Company remained resolute in its refusal to depart from the principle of cheap governance. Furthermore, it cannot have escaped the notice of the VOC's directors that the coffee sergeants charged with inspection had proven very susceptible to all kinds of corrupt practices.

The solution chosen by the Company may have been the cheapest, but was it the best option for increasing production? The delegation of authority to the district chiefs was little more than a cosmetic change, as the exercise of power at this level was little different from that in the regency headquarters. Chiefs, from high to low, acted as agents implementing the system of compulsory cultivation and delivery. Behind the facade of their cooperation in collecting the colonial tribute, however, they were in charge of a completely different economic activity: growing paddy. Although the paddy was not intended for export, it was of considerable economic importance, also to the chiefs themselves, and they gave this staple food preference over growing coffee at the behest of the VOC. They kept double accounts and gave priority to activities that were more lucrative and over which the Company had no control. In an attempt to ensure proper supervision, the Company issued the regent's substitute and his district chiefs with deeds of appointment. Nevertheless, coffee production continued to depend nominally on the regents, as a consequence of which their prosperity increased. But it was arguable whether this was enough to ensure their loyalty. Nicolaus Engelhard, Commissioner in the final decade of the eighteenth century, poignantly observed that the regents would have happily exchanged their riches for their lost freedom of action (De Haan I, 1910: 146).

Failing management

The discussion among policy-makers in the latter years of the VOC on how to proceed with the system of colonial exploitation did not at first lead to any change in the production of coffee for the expanding world market. The improved results were partly due to the Cultivation Instruction drawn up by Commissioner Rolff in 1789 on where, when and how coffee should be tended and harvested. He composed the manual based on his own experience, but also obtained information from the coffee sergeants and regents. It was the first attempt to use practical knowledge to give the cultivation of coffee a more professional basis (De Haan II, 1911: 631-43). Demand had risen gradually in the course of time, sometimes increasing more rapidly in response to specific events. In 1791, for example, when a slave uprising on the island of San Domingo put a stop to the export of coffee from this West Indian colony. The price rise that this caused on the European market stimulated the expansion of cultivation on Java. Newly appointed Commissioner Nicolaus Engelhard rapidly increased the level of supply, thereby playing an important role in assuring the budget required to continue the

colonial endeavour. He was succeeded in 1800 by Pieter Engelhard, who undoubtedly had his predecessor to thank for his appointment. Their close family ties (their mothers were sisters) did not prevent a rift developing between them, caused by the disappointing revenues in the final decades of the eighteenth century. The Company's directors had expressed their displeasure and the blame for this unexpected setback was laid at the door of the Regent of Cianjur, which was the main area of cultivation. He was accused of not supervising the picking, collection and delivery of the coffee properly. This criticism was just as applicable to the Commissioner, but he defended himself by accusing the coffee sergeants of false reporting. Shortly before he stepped down, Nicolaus saw an opportunity to rehabilitate himself by planting new trees on a large scale to compensate at least partly for the fall in production. With a display of admirable diligence, his successor succeeded in increasing production within a few years to the unprecedented level of more than 100,000 *pikul*. This was only possible by increasing compulsory cultivation to 1,000 coffee trees per household per year and stepping up the supervision by the inspectors.

In 1805, the greater effort required of the Commissioner to fulfil his demanding tasks led to him requesting a deputy to assist him. His request was approved and he agreed to the appointment of Lawick, who was his closest colleague, but the two soon clashed. Four regents who had dealings with the new *Kommissaris Kecil* complained to Engelhard about his deputy's inappropriate behaviour. According to the Regent of Sumadang, Lawick had set fire to a number of *kampungs* in the highlands in 1806, causing a local uprising that had led to an exodus to Cirebon (De Haan I, Personalia, 1910: 106). An alternative interpretation claimed that the Deputy Commissioner had incurred the displeasure of the Resident of Cirebon by alleging that his bad governance had led to the unrest. A committee set up to investigate the affair ruled in favour of Lawick, though its conclusions were disputable. Engelhard was suspended and his deputy was appointed acting Commissioner. Lawick continued to be held in high esteem under the new regime and Daendels would appoint him Prefect of the Cirebon Priangan lands.

Although the former Commissioner had fallen into disfavour, the inconvenience this caused meant only that the *kongsi* to which he belonged had to lie low for a while. Two years later, however, Engelhard found a powerful patron when Daendels was appointed Governor. Besides being promoted to influential and lucrative positions, he was also a partner in the purchase of private landed estates. From Daendels, who had called him 'very experienced and mild in his dealings with the natives', the once disgraced Commissioner had little difficulty in transferring his allegiance to

Thomas Stamford Raffles, who also had nothing but praise for Engelhard's governance of the regencies. De Haan summarized his career as follows: 'It is clear that he sought to make improvements and planted coffee with great enthusiasm, but it is equally certain that he had much cause to be grateful to his competent deputy, and that there are serious doubts about his financial integrity' (De Haan I, Personalia, 1910: 98). This was a judgment that could have applied just as easily to his cousin Nicolaus and to many other high-ranking VOC officials. Following these often long-lasting feuds reveals the lines along which individual interests were promoted. It was a close-knit network in which the various factions were held together or driven apart by family relationships or other ties of affinity. It is interesting to note that the regents, too, were very sophisticated in forming alliances with the colonial authorities, switching to a new coterie of prominent figures in good time whenever they felt it was necessary.

The downfall of the VOC manifested itself in a financial crisis, mainly due to huge internal corruption, that made it impossible to continue to run the Company on the old footing. De Haan described the activities of the trading company at the end of the eighteenth century as one big swindle (I, 1910: 324). The establishment of a state commission in 1790 could not prevent the debt burden from running up even further to the gigantic amount of 134 million guilders when the Company was wound up at the end of 1799. The VOC's bankruptcy must be seen in the context of the political changes that took place in the Netherlands at the end of the eighteenth century. During a political revolt in 1795, a republican movement which sided with the French revolution deposed the party favouring the princely *stadtholder* and established what was known as the Batavian Republic. In the wake of this regime change, on which I shall elaborate more in the next chapter, a state commission was set up by the new Dutch republic to replace the governing board of the VOC. This *Raad der Aziatische bezittingen en etablissmenten* (Council for Asian Possessions and Establishments), installed in 1800, took over all the assets and liabilities of the VOC. The Council's mandate was to prepare a blueprint for the future handling of colonial business.

In the preceding years, the VOC's governing board had tried in vain to avert the debacle by putting its own house in order. In 1793, a Commission-General arrived in Batavia to put a stop to the increasingly heavy losses. The most prominent member of the Commission, Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh, based his investigation completely on the selective information provided by the company's directors. Driven in the first place by their own interests, they were firm in rejecting far-reaching reforms from the very beginning. In his policy memorandum from 1796, *Consideratiën over*

de Jacatrasche en Priangan-Regentschappen, Nederburgh acknowledged that the payments to the coffee growers were indeed very meagre, not even enough to cover the costs of transport. But the Commissioner-General rejected a price rise to stimulate production, preferring to calculate how much the Company's profits could be increased by cutting back on expenses. The only dissenting voice from within the colonial apparatus was that of Dirk van Hogendorp. Shortly after being appointed as the VOC's trading agent in 1786, Van Hogendorp had been sent to Northern India to manage the Company's factory in the town of Patna that lay upstream from Calcutta on the Ganges river. He witnessed from close quarters the introduction of the Permanent Settlement, the tax system imposed by the British East India Company to reshape its domination over Bengal along different lines (Guha 1981). The debate then raging on who should be considered the owner of the land inspired him, a few years later after returning to Java, to express increasingly vocal criticism of the VOC's policy. In a radical departure from existing practice, Van Hogendorp advocated a land tax based on recognition of the ownership rights of the peasant population, paying civil servants and regents a fixed salary, abolishing corvee services and the system of compulsory delivery. He also recommended, as in India, the introduction of free trade between colony and mother country. The vested interests in Batavia were vehemently opposed to these modern ideas and were able to prevent Van Hogendorp from making his plans public. He was also a veritable thorn in the side of his superiors in other respects. In 1798, this high-ranking VOC official was even held in detention in Batavia accused of abuse of power and fraud (Fasseur 1985). He managed to escape and, after a halt in Bombay, reached the metropolis. He released his first publication in 1799, *Berigt van den tegenwoordigen toestand der Bataafsche bezittingen in Oost-Indië en den handel op dezelve*, in which he outlined his ideas on how to manage the colonial domain to the new government in Holland. And not without success: he was made a member of the state commission set up in 1802 to design a Charter for the East Indies. This document was, however, ultimately drawn up without him, due to his sudden departure abroad on diplomatic service for his new republican masters. His adversary, Nederburgh, had in the meantime returned from his colonial mission and was also appointed to the Charter Commission, so that he did have the opportunity to leave his mark on its report, which was published in 1804 (De Haan IV, 1912: 763-4). Nevertheless, the principles that Van Hogendorp advocated had won sufficient support for the final ordinance to be a compromise that satisfied neither party and had no impact at all on policy or practice.

The arguments employed in the dispute between the main proponent and opponent of radical reforms around the turn of the century continued to resound in colonial circles until the introduction of the cultivation system three decades later. In his riposte to the deliberations of his opponent, Nederburgh pointed out that the enormous costs incurred in building up a finely meshed government apparatus would reduce the profit destined for the state's coffers. Perhaps even more persuasive was his opinion that Javanese peasants would never increase production of their own free will. He believed that they lacked the sense of enlightened self-interest on which Van Hogendorp's argument was based. The exercise of force remained unavoidable, as Nederburgh had already stated in his *Consideratiën*.

> As far as the nature of the Inlander is concerned, he is lazy and slothful, and capable of no labour of any kind other than what they saw as absolutely necessary to meet their basic needs. (Nederburgh 1855: 122)

Van Hogendorp on the other hand, took account, if not of the presence, then of the imminent emergence of *homo economicus* in the Javanese landscape. Javanese peasants could, after all, only earn the head tax he proposed imposing along with the land tax in place of the corvee services by acting as market producers, i.e. by selling at least a part of the crops they produced. As Van Hogendorp wrote to his brother:

> … let us have the courage, as the English have done successfully in Bengal, to permit the Javanese peasant to own or lease his land. We shall then have people to deal with, rather than slaves or draught animals. Let us have the courage to abolish forced labour and corvee services, and introduce land tax on products and a small poll tax. And then we shall earn millions, yes millions, from this beautiful island, the most fertile land in the whole world. (Van Sillem 1890: 58-9)

The disagreement between Van Hogendorp and Nederburgh became less marked when the former proved willing to compromise on the issue of absolute ownership rights. He saw no reason why land that was not already in use should not be issued to non-native leaseholders. And the view that he was much more concerned with the welfare of the Javanese population than his opponent was somewhat tempered by the fact that both he and Nederburgh, as members of the Charter Commission, were bound by the instruction that exploitation of colonial possessions must 'provide the greatest value for the trade of the Republic and the greatest benefit for the

country's coffers'. Experience had shown that laying claim to the labour power of the peasants was a necessary condition for achieving this objective. Consequently, what became known in the first half of the nineteenth century as the cultivation system is correctly interpreted as an expansion and standardization of the regime set in place by the VOC.

After the fall of the VOC

When the VOC was wound up, the possibility of abandoning all interests built up in Asia over a period of two centuries was apparently never considered. There was clearly little doubt about the potential profitability of this distant endeavour. All experts in colonial affairs consulted were in favour of continued exploitation of the Dutch possessions in the East Indies. The Company's management had proved inefficient and ineffective. From this perspective, state-directed policies would increase colonial production and the consequential benefits for the mother country. After all, the purpose of a colony was to make a profit, and as much as possible. This was the main priority and the interests of the native population should not stand in the way. Only a few were willing to admit that the ideals of the Enlightenment that underpinned both the American War of Independence and the French Revolution should perhaps also be applied to the colonial rule in the tropics. Not of course with full recognition of the universal validity of liberty, equality and fraternity. These principles were essentially applicable only to the white tribes of the Atlantic community, and not to other parts of the world where other races lived and worked. But was it unthinkable for a foreign ruler, while seeking his own benefit, to also concern himself with increasing the happiness and prosperity of his indigenous subjects? Van Hogendorp believed in this civilizing mission and urged that it be recognized.

In terms of our domination of Java this means specifically: 'to protect these same Inlanders from all violence and hostility from without and within; to provide and assure them of civic liberty, the right to own property, protection from all oppression and the exercise of impartial and fair justice' (Van Hogendorp 1800: 8). Nevertheless this enlightened politician, too, proved unwilling to demand the unconditional and immediate application of these high ideals.

The advice that the Charter Commission published in 1804 essentially recommended continuation of the existing state of affairs. That was not so surprising since, after Van Hogendorp's premature departure, Nederburgh had free rein in the Commission. He was the final editor of the report

and made sure that the system of forced cultivation and corvee services remained intact; his opponent's proposal to acknowledge the peasants as the rightful owners of their fields was explicitly rejected in the text. Nederburgh wrote to the private owner of an estate who had returned to Holland to ask how the indigenous population would respond to abolition of the compulsory cultivation of coffee. The answer he received – that they would no longer grow it – was exactly why Nederburgh wanted to preserve the regime of forced cultivation. The outcome of the clash between the reformers and those who wanted to retain the existing system was determined much more by external conditions than by the power of the arguments on both sides. The political changes in the metropolis made it imperative that the old regime in the colony be maintained for an unspecified period. The uncertainty about the nature and limits of the state-building process in Europe may not have been an obstacle to the drafting of radical plans for reform, but there was no question of these ideas or of a complete new system, as envisaged by Van Hogendorp (1800: 194), being introduced in practice for the time being. That political uncertainty was fuelled by the unpredictability of the economic future. Would an increase in production not lead to a much greater supply of colonial goods than the demand that could be expected to materialize in the world market?

Besides the political and economic volatility, the unfamiliarity of the main actors with the structure of colonial society also played a role in the ambivalent policy climate of these years. Van Hogendorp had only recently returned to Java when he committed his far-reaching reforms to paper. His opponents especially criticized him for his lack of experience with the situation on the workfloor. But this objection, though never explicitly expressed, applied much more to Nederburgh. He based his reform plan completely on what he had been told by Commissioner Nicolaus Engelhard, who was both a fierce defender and one of the main beneficiaries of the Priangan coffee regime, and was dismissed from his post several years later after being accused of involvement in illegal and oppressive practices. Nederburgh's familiarity with the region that he had been sent to investigate was limited to a week's tour of Cianjur. The *Consideratiën* with which he concluded his assignment in 1796 was based on a single source: the Commissioner's reports on the regencies from the preceding years. As custodian of the colonial archives, De Haan did not have a high opinion of the Company directors' knowledge of the country and its people towards the end of the eighteenth century. The battle for or against reform was fought without concrete facts or information on which the conflicting parties could agree or disagree.

What was actually known about Java? Very little, according to the archivist himself (De Haan I, 1910: 442). The Commissioner may have had to submit an annual report after the middle of the eighteenth century, but there was no such memorandum left behind when he stepped down. Knowledge gained on the job was hardly recorded and certainly did not go further than his own office. The curiosity of the VOC directors was limited to the Company's trade results (De Haan I, 1910: 423). With the disappearance of the VOC, an early-colonial state emerged in the early years of the nineteenth century. What form did this take and what arrangements were made for the Priangan Regencies? After all, this remained the first and most profitable region for producing coffee for export to the metropolis. The experience gained in the Priangan was taken into account when drafting plans for the future and new policies were often first tried out here in practice.

A conservative reformer

The transition at home from the Batavian Republic to the newly founded Kingdom of Holland under French tutelage also meant a changing of the guard in the East Indies. A strong character was needed who could bring order to the chaotic colonial affairs and who possessed the military qualities to withstand the growing threat to Java from the English enemy. Herman Willem Daendels was the perfect man for the job. He was already Field Marshall of Holland when he was appointed Governor-General. On arriving in the colony in early 1808, he had a reputation as a domineering personality, which would be confirmed by the way in which he fulfilled his tasks in the three years that followed. His orders had been to prevent the British from taking over Java and, no less important, to bring order and structure to the management of the country's Asian possessions without causing too much disruption. He was given explicit instructions not to introduce radical reforms (De Haan IV, 1912: 772-4). His first concern was to secure the incomes that were indispensable to Holland's financial solvability, and there was no doubt about how they were to be obtained. Shortly after his arrival, he announced what would take priority in his policy: the cultivation of coffee (Daendels 1814).

The instruction announcing this intention to continue on the same course was known as the Priangan Ruling. It applied primarily to the region where coffee cultivation had first been made compulsory and had acquired the character of a tax in the form of labour. In Daendels' opinion, Pieter Engelhard had greatly improved the payments owed to the peasant

producers for the coffee they supplied. Strict instructions were now intended to put a stop to practices allowing the long chain of European and native intermediaries to appropriate much more or, conversely, be paid much less than was merited by the services they provided. To achieve this, he proposed a differentiated scale of payment according to rank, based on a standard *pikul*, the unit of payment. One aim of the reform was to release the Priangan regents from their debts to the Commissioner or the coffee sergeants, which they attempted to pay off by extorting money from the peasants, who were therefore held in a state of subordination. In exchange for cancelling the enormous debts of the regents, they had to promise to give up their spendthrift behaviour. The new system also meant that the native chiefs would no longer be entitled to the homage and annual gifts they were accustomed to receiving and would give up their right to demand unlimited corvee services from their clientele for their own requirements. According to the same principle, the government could only requisition labour, for example for the transport of goods and persons, if it paid for the work done. The cautious attempt was to redesign the colonial apparatus along modern bureaucratic lines. It was no more than a first step, as the salaries of the officials remained linked to the collection of the colonial surplus. Furthermore, day-to-day practice remained far removed from this administrative guideline. The reforms meant no change in the modality of forced coffee cultivation, for example by introducing free labour or considering a transition to the free market, but represented more an attempt to clean up its corruptive features. Daendels solemnly promised to exempt the population from all other obligations than the cultivation of coffee. Essentially, this perpetuated the situation that he had encountered in the Priangan Regencies on his appointment. He made the pledge in the resolute expectation that it would result in an enormous boost in production.

To realize his optimistic planning, Daendels considered it advisable to introduce coffee cultivation in other parts of Java, and on the same basis as that he had ordered in the Priangan Regencies. The harvest, which had been 120,000 *pikul* the year before Daendels arrived, would – according to his calculations – rise to 180,000 *pikul* in the short term, and to no less than 300,000 *pikul* in the somewhat longer term. It was not until quite some time after the Priangan Ruling was announced that Daendels specified the tax that he would impose on the people of the main region of production: maintaining 1,000 fruit-bearing trees per household, twice as many as elsewhere on Java.

There were almost no exemptions from this labour tax (De Haan I 1910: 450-1). His long-serving advisers contradicted their superior's belief that lack

of administrative will and carelessness had prevented a rapid expansion of coffee cultivation outside the Priangan Regencies. According to them, it would not have succeeded there without resorting to naked coercion. In 1810, Lawick once again made it clear that none of those involved in coffee cultivation, from the regent down to the most lowly cultivator, would have chosen to do freely what had been imposed on them as an obligation. This piece of information was not new; in his last annual report as Commissioner in 1800, Nicolaus Engelhard had stated that 'the Javanese, with very few exceptions, plant coffee unwillingly and have to be driven to work at it with the use of violence' (De Haan III, 1912: 628). Daendels did not appreciate or accept these assessments from his subordinates. He claimed that the Javanese peasants had never owned the land they tilled and had always had to pay tribute to their chiefs. In his view, the system of coffee cultivation was simply a continuation of a form of tribute through labour that the peasants had traditionally paid to their monarch, who was also the owner of the land (Daendels 1814: 104). Lawick was one of those who did not shy away from disagreeing with Daendels. In a memorandum he reported that the paddy fields in his jurisdiction, the Cirebon Priangan lands, were privately owned. Daendels put forward other arguments to justify his policy. The Governor-General admitted that the lot of the common man was pitiful and needed to be improved but blamed this on the extortion of the indigenous chiefs, having nothing to do with the system of forced cultivation and delivery. He alleged that it was little effort for the Priangan peasants to do what was required of them. Moreover, their anything but heavy burden was richly rewarded with a wage equal to eight *stuivers* a day. Daendels made no secret of the fact that, since he had appeared on the colonial scene, the poverty-stricken lives of the local people had much improved. This was a conceit that not only later critics, but also many of his contemporaries, were not inclined to accept. There was no basis for Daendels' statement that, under his regime, the coffee growers were paid the official rate, which was, moreover, fixed at an extremely low level. The man who actually created the Priangan system undeniably succeeded in increasing coffee production but, as before, coercion was the lever used to achieve it.

Strengthening the government apparatus

When he left the Netherlands, Daendels was given strict orders not to introduce any reforms. That would have to wait until peace had returned to the European continent now in a state of turmoil. The new

Governor-General adhered to his mandate to mind the colonial shop until better times arrived and not to make any radical changes. His tenure was characterized by tightening up the regime as it existed. Nevertheless, the avalanche of instructions he issued did lay out the contours of a new system that brought to an end a long period of makeshift arrangements, indecisive muddling through and a general lack of direction. The process of standardization entailed restructuring the Priangan Regencies. Although he further bifurcated the ties between the lands around Batavia and the highlands, Daendels chose to retain those between the highlands and the coastal plain more to the east. This administrative division in turn came to an end with the abolition of the sultanate of Cirebon, the demotion of the royal family in rank, and the reduction of this old principality in size to little more than the coastal belt. The border changes were not restricted to the re-demarcation of regencies but, strikingly, also extended to designating districts as well-bounded territorial units. The introduction of new powers for the police and the judiciary resulted in both a widening and deepening of the power of the colonial state. These changes signified the end of the much less structured and more fluid rule practised under the old regime. After the reorganization, each regency formed a geographical entity and the enclaves of the native chiefs in each other's domains disappeared. But this process of administrative streamlining went even further and led to the random abolition and merging of old administrative landscapes – not once, but repeatedly (De Haan IV 1912: 870). The nonchalance with which this policy was put into practice was accompanied by a government apparatus that remained at a distance and operated through the mediation of the native aristocracy. The Governor-General's order to produce maps, keep statistical records and gather information on the economy was intended to furnish the government with more and better knowledge of the land it was governing. The colonial hierarchy was reformed by defining administrative competences and by better coordinating the tasks of European officials, placing them within a streamlined top-down structure. The instruction to submit accurate reports on the implementation of assignments served to build up an institutional memory that would improve the quality of governance and policy. When Daendels asked in 1809 about the size of each Priangan regency and district, he was told that this was impossible to determine because there were no accurate maps of these lands. A year later, his staff informed him that the population of these areas was much larger than the regents, fearing an increase in taxation, were accustomed to claiming. The need for more knowledge about the land and

its people grew as the government's involvement in indigenous society deepened. Gathering this information was not only an end in itself, a condition for more effective government, but was primarily inspired by the desire to increase colonial profits. The embedding of the early-colonial state apparatus in indigenous society left much to be desired. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, for example, an order came from the headquarters in Amsterdam to increase coffee production to 100,000 *pikul*, but the preconditions for achieving this were not in place. There was no capacity to store experience that had been gained or to make use of what had happened or been decided before. A good example is how the coffee manual designed by Rolff was simply lost in the badly kept records. When Pieter Engelhard tried to find the document in 1806, he did not come across a single copy in the archives. The revised version he drafted did not last long either as, in 1808, Lawick felt compelled to issue an instruction that was a compilation of the two previous documents. Nor was this the last time; in 1819, after searching in vain for the manual on coffee cultivation, the Inspector of Finances again had to draw up a new set of guidelines, which in their turn soon disappeared from sight (De Haan II, 1911: 633-5).

The reinforcement of the government apparatus was accompanied by a new system of appointing, promoting and paying European staff. The introduction of fixed salaries was intended to impose restrictions on all kinds of fringe benefits, such as gifts in exchange for favours. The hierarchy of official ranks meant that the system lost the mercantile character that harked back to the VOC period and increasingly took on the characteristics of a proper government bureaucracy. The administrative reforms were of course not unrelated to the advent of the Napoleonic state in Europe. Much more radical than the change in the position of this rather thin upper crust of expatriate administrators was the incorporation of the regents in the colonial bureaucracy. From now on, these indigenous chiefs would enter the service of the Dutch state when they were appointed and were no longer their own bosses but subordinate to the prefect. The latter would nominate them – and the *patih* who acted as their substitutes – for appointment or dismissal to the Governor-General. The prefect himself would decide on the continued services or not of lower chiefs. This new step towards establishing a hierarchy of authority restricted the free room for manoeuvre that the Javanese nobility had enjoyed and should be seen in the light of persistent complaints in the preceding years about the large numbers of lower chiefs, the retinue of hangers-on with which the regents surrounded themselves. As before, the

indigenous authorities were obliged to collect taxes from the peasants in the form of products and labour services. For this mediation, they did not receive a fixed salary, like their European counterparts, but a modest share of the tribute. By strictly regulating the distribution of the costs of mediation, Daendels endeavoured to bring to an end the discretionary powers of the aristocracy to redistribute part of the emoluments among their subordinates as they saw fit. A provision from 1808 prescribed that, for every *rijksdaalder* that the regent was paid for a *pikul* of coffee, twelve *stuivers* were to be paid to the lower chiefs. These chiefs and the remuneration they were entitled to were specified in minute detail (De Klein 1931: 50). It was a cash reward for their involvement in the cultivation of coffee and possibly other export crops. The regents and, through them, the lower chiefs received even more in kind, in the form of a share of the paddy harvest. These indigenous officials were treated as subordinates, as nothing more than the executors of the orders issued to them by their white bosses. The loss of the less constricted power they had enjoyed until then also led to the disappearance of the respect they were entitled to in the past. Daendels himself set the tone for this new form of governance. The harsh and crass way he treated even the most high-ranking chiefs meant that his name became a legend in the Priangan lands (De Haan I, 1910: 469). The undisguised contempt with which the colonial officials treated the indigenous aristocracy was bolstered by their suspicion that this intermediate administrative layer was guilty of extorting their people. At the same time, Daendels was fully aware that, without the voluntary cooperation of the regents, his attempt to increase colonial revenues was doomed to failure.

Perhaps it was with this in mind that Daendels decided to increase the share of the paddy harvest that the peasants had to relinquish to the regent and his entourage. The *cuke* was traditionally no more than a twentieth part of the harvest. At the end of a tour of the Priangan region in 1809, which took him from Batavia via Cianjur, Bandung and Sumedang to Cirebon, Daendels offered to double the share of the harvest destined for the chiefs. On top of this came the *zakat*, the share that went to the clergy, which was also set at a tenth part. This brought the total share that the peasants had to surrender to no less than a fifth, much more than what they previously had to give up. Unfamiliarity with or confusion about prevailing customs most probably had little to do with the granting of this generous remuneration to the landed gentry, at the expense of the peasant population. After all, the tenth part of the harvest that the chiefs were formerly entitled to explicitly included the share of

the clergy. An important consideration for Daendels in attributing the regents a higher share in the paddy production was the state of debt in which they continued to find themselves, also after the bankruptcy of the VOC. Their continued cooperation in the cultivation of crops for export could only be assured by rewarding them more generously and in a way that did not cost the colonial state a cent. There was no money to give the native chiefs a fixed salary and the discovery that they had to incur a wide variety of previously unknown costs for the coffee cultivation contributed to this material generosity towards them. Daendels did not consider it a problem that the peasant population had to bear the costs of this greater generosity by surrendering a much higher share of their food production than before. Increasing the local chiefs' share of the peasants' food production gave new impetus to the restructuring of society along hierarchical lines under early-colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. In sparsely populated regions, however, where much of the land had not yet been cultivated, the gentry was more reserved in collecting the share of the harvest to which they were entitled. High-ranking officials were sensitive to this accommodating attitude and proved equally willing to be flexible in imposing obligations on the chiefs. This changed, however, once the colonial bureaucracy began to acquire a better understanding of peasant society on the ground. The landed gentry proved to have a lot more people at their disposal than had previously been assumed, meaning that a large part of the potential surplus labour remained underutilized. In this light, it is not surprising that, parallel to the restructuring of social relations along strict hierarchical lines, there was also progressive trend towards structuring the administration on a territorial basis.

Knowledge of the landscape in which the colonial government operated was still superficial and the chiefs were instructed to meet the urgent need for more information (Daendels, 20 September 1808, *Bijlagen Organique Stukken* 1814). The administrative instruction introduced by the Governor-General signified a break with the inadequate, incomplete and slapdash way in which acquired knowledge had previously been handled. On the other hand, however, his reform can be seen as a logical continuation and streamlining of the policy that the VOC had initiated much earlier. Attention to indigenous social life, if it existed at all, was also based solely on utilitarian considerations. To solve the scarcity of labour, Daendels issued orders to discourage people from roaming from place to place without a permanent address and to encourage marriage as a way of stimulating the persistently low population growth. In an instruction issued in 1808, he imposed this responsibility on the regents.

> One of the main concerns of the regents should be to ensure that the common inlander does not remained unmarried and to encourage all marriageable young men and women to enter the state of matrimony, so as to prevent aimless drifting around and many other undesirable tendencies, and to ensure that the population grows in a regulated manner. (Van Deventer I, 1865: 32 footnote)

A final new development was recognition of the role of the clergy in imposing agrarian discipline on the population. The village priests supervised the preparation of the fields for cultivation and told the peasants when they should perform the various operations and kept a calendar of rotation for this purpose. In addition to their religious duties, such as leading prayers, reading from the Koran, attending family celebrations and sacrificial feasts, and performing rituals on holy days, they kept records of births, marriages and deaths in the peasant communities to which they were attached. Besides collecting the religious taxes, the clergy also helped to collect the *cuke*, the share of the harvest destined for the chiefs. This task was a form of recognition of their involvement in civil governance. Cianjur in particular was a bulwark of piety, and the ruling nobility made a significant contribution to this reputation. In the early-colonial period, the Priangan experienced a process of Islamization, which received remarkably little attention in the annals of the VOC. It was no coincidence that the new religion spread particularly quickly in the region that owed allegiance to Cirebon. In 1778, the regents of Cianjur and Bogor submitted a request for permission to each send a priest to Mecca and in 1802 five *radèns* from Cianjur likewise expressed the same wish. Completing this pilgrimage was incidentally not recommended for those wishing to be eligible as regents. Fear of unrest provoked Daendels in 1810 to order that Mohammedan priests were permitted to travel only if equipped with a pass and, a year later, the English authorities distributed a circular warning that the Saids 'or native priests' were firebrands (De Haan IV, 1912: 747). The large groups of village priests, especially those in Cianjur, were referred to as 'parasitic plants' and the Governor ordered in 1809 that the excessive numbers of priests in Sukapura should be reduced and their exemption from coffee cultivation rescinded.

Social restructuring

Western authority gradually moved closer to the workfloor of the colonial enterprise, or at least attempted to do so. One indication of this

trend is an instruction issued by Daendels in 1809 to combat the widely dispersed pattern of settlements in the Cirebon Priangan lands. The instruction ordered the population from then on to live in villages of a specific minimum size. Small hamlets with less than six households were not recognized and had to merge with larger settlements. The same instruction also specified who was in charge at this local level. Larger settlements with more than ten households were given permission to have two headmen, while those with six to ten had only one (*Organique Stukken Cheribon*, no. 4, art. 14 and no. 7, art. 27, Daendels 1814). A next step, taken some ten years later, was to order the village council to write reports on the demeanour of the villagers. A regulation for the police administration in 1819 instructed village headmen to keep records of the number, gender, age and occupation of all their inhabitants. These records were passed up through the district chiefs to the regents, who sent them on to the Resident. The need for this kind of 'intelligence' was driven by the ambition to step up colonial surveillance, but the orders to submit accurate reports came up against a lack of both willingness and ability to pass on this information.

Under the Field Marshall, the compulsory cultivation of coffee expanded strongly. The number of trees on Java grew by more than 45 million, from 26,956,467 in 1808 to 72,669,860 three years later. The pretension of keeping a very accurate count – down to the very last tree – was typical of the colonial administration's facade in the first half of the nineteenth century. Besides the Priangan Regencies, coffee was grown in a large number of new areas in Central and Eastern Java. In 1808, as a consequence of the expansion of the area of land planted with this crop, Daendels appointed an Inspector-General for Coffee Cultivation, C. von Winckelmann, who was given the tasks that the Commissioner of Indigenous Affairs had until then performed, but solely for the Priangan Regencies. Daendels dismissed the last Commissioner on the spot, who had the impudence to blame his boss for causing such unrest among the people during his last tour of the Sunda highlands in 1808 that it was sure to have a detrimental effect on the imminent coffee harvest. The Marshall would bully his close associates as easily as he did the indigenous chiefs. With almost two thirds of all the coffee trees on Java, the Priangan remained the prime money-spinner, as Table 3.1 shows. This region, where coffee growing had long been concentrated, experienced the greatest expansion in the first decade of the nineteenth century, from 7.5 million trees in 1801-02 to almost 42 million in 1810-11.

Table 3.1 Number of trees planted from 1806/7 to 1810/11 and of planters in 1810/11 in the Jakarta and Priangan Regencies[9]

Regency	1806-7	1807-8	1808-9	1809-10	1810-11	h/holds
Bogor	336,370	274,100	262,505	447,000	463,000	2283
Cianjur	1,444,106	821,603	1,401,644	918,715	1,169,570	5813
Bandung	1,357,525	811,540	665,500	1,620,200	1,042,730	4060
Par.muncang	560,700	479,860	1,040,570	1,186,800	678,621	3271
Sumedang	362,760	189,300	538,550	918,130	702,500	2998
Krawang	359,398	145,915	151,958	160,490	119,100	636
Limbangan	96,000	110,000	314,400	346,210	…	1918
Sukapura	304,800	110,000	1,255,200	686,300	36,800	2656
Galuh	67,400	54,700	1,370,000	1,351,500	522,100	1705
Total	4,889,059	2,898,018	7,000,327	7,635,345	4,735,421	25,340

The stricter regime that Daendels introduced is illustrated in the Priangan Ruling for the cultivation and delivery of coffee, which he announced in 1808. Among the new provisions was the ordinance that, with the exception of chiefs and those unfit to work, no one was exempt from compulsory cultivation. This included the elderly, widows and village priests, who had formerly been exempt. Children counted from below the age of 14, but before then had to work along with their parents. Three years later, the Governor-General stipulated what the labour tribute was to be for the people of the Priangan: besides maintaining 1,000 trees a year, they had to plant 200 new saplings to compensate for older trees dying off. The lifetime of a reasonably fertile tree was set at five years, so that a fifth part of the total number of trees had be replenished each year to consolidate productive capacity. This was the same requirement as before but, because of the intention to make the government's claim more effective, compliance would be monitored more strictly. Keeping records of those liable to pay the taxes – the 'coffee books' that the work bosses had to keep and submit – played an important role here in achieving this aim. To discourage people from deserting if the pressure became too great, coffee cultivation was also introduced in areas that were ill-suited to it because of low soil fertility or inaccessibility (De Haan III, 1912: 626). The increase in the harvest in 1810 to around 120,000 *pikul* shows that these stricter rules had the desired effect, and that the

9 Figures submitted by Inspector-General for Coffee Cultivation C. von Winckelmann in 1811 and annexed to Organique Stukken der Koffij-Cultuur, in: H.W. Daendels – Staat der Nederlandsche Oostindische Bezittingen. The Hague 1814.

efforts in previous years had been successful, with the planting of new trees driven up to record levels. Daendels was clearly pleased with the results, but realized that the population had reached its limit and nothing more could be demanded of them (De Haan I, 1910: 142).

The fanaticism with which coffee cultivation was driven forward in the Priangan Regencies is shown by figures provided by Daendels himself. The 25,340 households that, according to his calculations, were involved in coffee production in these regions in 1810-11 were responsible for an average of 1,653 coffee trees each. A report from 1812 claims that these figures are even higher in most districts: 'Each family has the charge of 1,000 fruit-bearing trees, and in most districts two or three times as many' (De Haan IV, 1912: 785). As observed above, Daendels had no objections at all to preserving forced cultivation, though he recognized the right of the growers to a reasonable payment for their efforts. The abuses surrounding the payment of the coffee money, he declared in no uncertain terms, must come to an end. The Governor-General did not, however, include among the extortionate practices he tried to deter the extremely low payments with which the peasants were palmed off. The price they were paid, four *rijksdaalders* per *pikul*, had been at the same level for many decades. In his own words, this payment was not to be seen as a realistic wage but more as a kind of 'collection allowance' since, according to his reasoning, by delivering coffee, the growers were rendering the tribute they owed to the state. What they received was in any case a fraction of the price that was paid for the coffee when it arrived in Batavia. The peasants were ultimately fobbed off with so little that, in some areas, they did not even make the effort to deliver the beans to the warehouse.

For Daendels, extortion referred only to the deductions the chiefs appropriated for themselves before paying the growers. This meant that, while he tried to combat minor irregularities and other abuses by standardizing the weight of the *pikul* in which the coffee was measured on delivery, encouraging the building of more warehouses to lighten the load of the heavy transport, banning the practice of charging peasants for overhead costs, and ordering that coffee money be paid directly to the growers on delivery, the greatest injustice simply continued to exist. The regents received a separate commission of one *rijksdaalder* per *pikul* of 128 pounds weight, much lower than the 225 pounds on the basis of which the peasants were paid. Around a quarter of this commission was to be passed on to the lesser chiefs. The debt the regents owed to the government was cancelled, but they were told that they could no longer ask for or receive credit. It is doubtful whether these instructions were actually put into practice. Most of them got no further

than the drawing board. Tampering with the weights continued. If the growers delivered their coffee to small depots closer to their habitat, they were paid much less than they were entitled to for transporting the beans to the main but far-off warehouses. According to a report from 1811, they received around half of what they had a right to (De Haan 1910: 457). Nor was there any change in the standard practice of paying the regents an advance and deduct this when their accounts were settled each year. Daendels saw himself as a reformer who was very concerned about the welfare of the population. One of his early instructions was remarkable, giving very precise guidelines for how to till the paddy fields in Cirebon. The landowners had to keep a store of seed of exactly the right quality in sufficient quantities, comply with a planting schedule to minimize the risk of a failed harvest, leave no fields untilled, inform the lower chiefs of the time of the harvest to ensure that they received the fifth share, etc., etc. Ensuring strict compliance with these orders also entailed expanding the network of irrigation canals to allow paddy to be grown in inundated fields. When regulating the cultivation of compulsory crops, Daendels assumed that growing coffee did not require a great effort from the population. He calculated that it would mean no more than two months' work a year per household (*cacah kopi*), a tally that included picking, drying and transporting the beans to the warehouse. In exchange, with an average production of two to three *pikul*, the peasants were supposed to be paid eight to twelve *rijksdaalders*. This converted to a daily wage of eight *stuivers*, according to Daendels the highest rate paid on Java.[10] In other words, rather than complain about coercion and underpayment, the peasants should have had good reason to be content.

Stepping up corvee services

The Governor-General also prided himself on having considerably reduced the extent of corvee services. He may not have gone as far as Van Hogendorp, who had argued in favour of completely abolishing these unpaid labour services, but did want to restrict them to maintenance of roads and bridges and the transport of persons and goods on the orders of the government. Laying new roads, digging canals, building government offices and other infrastructural works would from then on have to be paid for in the form of a daily wage or subcontracting. This regulation, too, remained

10 This amount is apparently based on an average annual production of two to three *pikul* of coffee per household.

non-operational. Daendels wanted to open up Java to modern traffic and he requisitioned the labour required to achieve that ambition. He explained the need for this in his memoir: 'There were no paved roads, no checkpoints, no bungalows for overnight accommodation; even in the lands around Batavia, there were only a few roads that were suitable for wheeled vehicles' (Daendels 1814: 17). Suitable, that was the keyword in the mass mobilization of unpaid labour. From this perspective, the roads already existed, so the working population could be requisitioned to improve them *en masse* and free of charge. Even the *Grote Postweg*, the main trunk road traversing the region, was largely laid 'at no cost to the state'. Little came of the intention to hire coolies to build the more difficult sections of the road and the work was done by rounding up villagers in Priangan, who not only received no payment but no food either. The use of forced labour for this project cost many thousands of lives, and a much larger number fled to avoid being conscripted. The regions through which the road passed were deserted for many miles on both sides and the heavy transport duties that accompanied the construction work led to failure of the rice harvest and a fall in coffee production (De Haan I, 1910: 491; IV: 97-904). The new long-distance road was primarily of military and strategic importance, enabling faster communications between different parts of Java. The indigenous people were not allowed to use it to transport their coffee in buffalo carts. This meant that there were sometimes three roads running parallel, the worst of which was for indigenous traffic. The custom of requisitioning unpaid labour continued not only for infrastructural works: in the regency of Bandung alone, 200 porters had to be permanently available to carry letters and accompany officials. Horses and their drivers were also conscripted in large numbers for the same reasons. Daendels himself did not shy from emphasizing his supreme status by making almost unrestricted use of the services of the Priangan people in the palace that had been built for him in Bogor (De Haan I 1910: 493-4). Looking at the cultivation and corvee services required by the government as a whole, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the pressure on the population much increased rather than decreased under Daendels' regime.

The self-righteousness displayed by the Governor-General contrasted strongly with the dismal outcome of his policy. Despite his claims to the contrary, he failed to perform the task he was charged with when he was appointed Governor-General, namely 'to improve and secure the lot of the common Inlander; to abolish all irregular and arbitrary taxes and other abuses' (art. 29 in the instruction from the King of Holland). When all is said and done, the reforms introduced by the Field Marshall benefited the

colonial state and harmed the people. Although the reach of the government came closer to the peasant order and the requirements for detailed reporting were gradually raised, insight into what actually happened at the foot of the economy remained very limited. A lack of factual data is, however, no excuse for the praise that Daendels bestowed on his own deeds. Contemporary critics made it clear that he should have known better. According to Johannes van den Bosch, who was to become the founding father of the cultivation system, forced coffee cultivation under Daendels took up not two but six months of a household's annual working time. This much higher estimate also took no account of the peasants' obligation to provide transport services and accompany travelling officials (De Haan, I: 458). Van den Bosch's calculations were undoubtedly driven by hostility towards the former Governor-General, who had forced him to leave Java in 1810. But, in the same year, Lawick – a loyal servant to the Governor-General – sent his superior a letter that left no room for misunderstanding about the hatred of the indigenous population, from high to low, for the coffee regime (De Haan IV, 1912: 811). In the absence of reasonable payment for their labour, the people of Priangan had such an aversion to growing this crop that brute force was the only way to ensure its continuation.

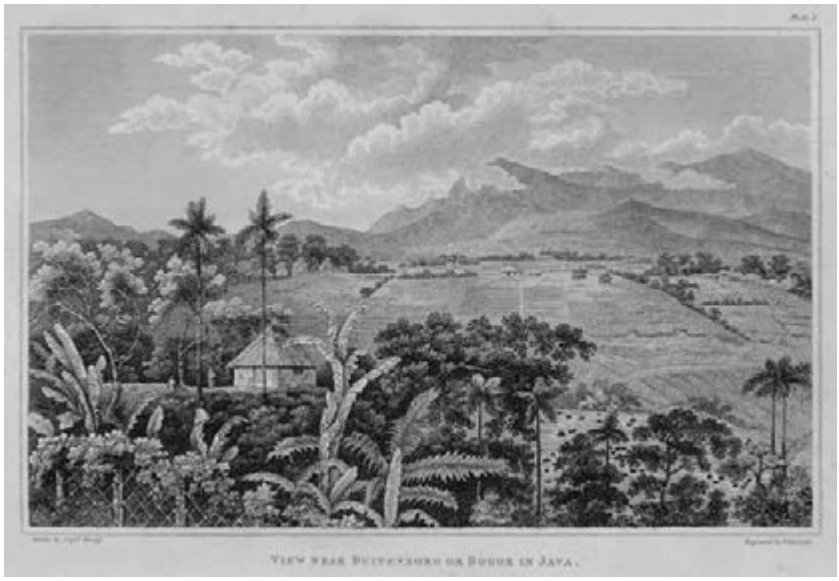
Were there no alternative options to derive the greatest possible profit from the possessions in the East Indies? Very soon after the VOC had established its authority over the hinterland, large estates had grown up in the area around Batavia, which grew food for the city as well as a variety of commercial crops, including sugarcane and, later, coffee for export. These private estates were often owned by Company officials, who usually left the daily management to hired hands, caretakers who had left the Company, and contractors, who were usually Europeans, Chinese or locals of mixed race. These managers employed local peasants and migrants from elsewhere who had settled in the area. On some of the estates, these newcomers – who came from close by or further afield – made up the main workforce. Over time, the number of estates increased, mainly on the coastal plain but also encroaching on the foothills of the Priangan highlands. They dominated the area known as the *Bataviasche Ommelanden*, the lands on the urban outskirts. Lacking sufficient public funds, Daendels was forced to sell off land, resulting in a new wave of expansion of these privately owned estates. The Governor-General did not lose sight of his own interests in this process. He had the Council of the Indies allocate him an extensive area of land in Bogor that had been owned by the government. This domain covered an area of no less than 236 square kilometres. After increasing the profitability of his acquisition, by raising the paddy tax and other levies, he sold part of

it back to the government, including the land on which the palace he lived in stood, and another part in the form of private estates. These transactions were very lucrative for him, but irreparably sullied his reputation.

Daendels considered the promotion of private agro-industry an effective means of stimulating economic growth. Land was now sold not only on the northern coastal plain of West Java but also elsewhere on the island, 'a large part of which can be transformed into plantations for sugar, cotton, indigo and other products in only a few years' (Daendels 1814: 111). There was no interest in buying such government concessions from among the Javanese gentry. Daendels took this as proof of his belief that land ownership was an unknown and undesirable notion for the colonized people. He made it clear that no land was to be sold in the Priangan Regencies as this would have a harmful effect on the cultivation of coffee, which he was resolute to avoid at all costs. He was, however, prepared to allow Chinese interested in cultivating new land to do so. They would have to grow crops like tobacco, cotton, indigo and peanuts, which in his view the native population were not willing or able to grow. Daendels expected this form of agribusiness to contribute to increased prosperity in the Sunda lands. His experiment to set up Chinese *kampungs,* encouraging 'this diligent but not very trustworthy race' to live in settlements of their own so that they could be more easily kept under control, also ended in failure. The Governor-General's intended policy seemed to be based on an agronomic division into two zones, with private estates on the coastal plain focusing on newer crops for export and the higher lands reserved mainly for the production of coffee under the direct supervision of the government. There was, however, insufficient time to promote this two-pronged policy out, both modalities of which assumed the sustained servitude of the peasantry.

The common denominator of all the measures introduced was that they should not negatively affect the coffee regime, and the profit that this crop generated for the state's coffers remained the main priority in all decisions taken. The regents and lesser chiefs, subject to the instructions of the colonial administration even more than in the Company period, continued to be indispensable as mediators in imposing the heavy burden on the population. The entire package of measures relating to coffee cultivation in western Java drawn up by the Governor-General would continue to exist from 1808 as the Priangan Ruling. The colonial exploitation of this region at the start of the nineteenth century differed substantially in a number of ways from the policy practised throughout the rest of the island. As before, the Priangan regime was determined by the government monopoly on coffee production and the forced planting, cultivation and harvesting of

View of Buitenzorg (Bogor) in the early 19th century



Source: J. Crawfurd, vl. 1, 1820

this crop by the local population. The regents received no fixed allowance in money or kind for their managerial role, but a commission which depended on the volume produced. Daendels is rightly seen as the formal founder of the Priangan system (De Haan I, 1910: 496). He owed this reputation not to his introduction of a new system in these highlands in West Java but, as befits a conservative reformer, to the fact that he streamlined a mode of production that had been established much earlier.

Sealing off the Priangan

The separate regime imposed to ensure that the metropolis continued to enjoy maximum profit from its colonial assets was emphasized further by sealing off the Priangan Regencies from undesirable contacts with the outside world. The best way to preserve peace and order was to keep the inhabitants shut away in their settlements to the greatest extent possible. After all, they had no reason whatsoever to go elsewhere. Outsiders were permitted to travel through the Priangan lands only with a pass. European visitors were kept out with the argument that they disrupted the lives of the local population by demanding their unpaid services. In addition,

all other newcomers who did not belong in the region were considered suspect. On discovery, they were relentlessly expelled, even if they showed no evidence of bad intentions. There were various reasons for this vigilance. Firstly, the state of extreme unrest in the neighbouring *Ommelanden,* the twilight zone between Batavia and the foothills further inland. At the end of the eighteenth century, this buffer had a bad reputation as a refuge for thieves, robbers and murderers, who could commit their criminal deeds here beyond the reach of colonial authority. In the surroundings of Bogor there were regular bandit gangs active with upwards of 100 members. By keeping an eye on the traffic to and from the highlands, the authorities wanted to ensure that the disorder on the coastal plain did not spill over into the coffee producing areas, where the people were known for their simplicity and natural tractability.

A second, less publicized reason for this sharp surveillance was to combat coffee smuggling. The government monopoly meant that the coffee brought a much higher price on arrival in Batavia than had been paid to the growers and their brokers in the hinterland, who could get a much better deal on the black market. By denying merchants and bulk buyers access to the Priangan Regencies, it was possible to shield the planters from these shady and undesirable transactions. The measures had some effect but not enough to put a stop to the illegal purchase and transport of coffee. However, the main beneficiaries of this illicit trade were the agents and brokers, both European and indigenous, whose job it was as coffee sergeants, warehouse masters, loaders or clerks to take care of the receipt and further transport of the products of forced cultivation from the hinterland to the coast. The *Ommelanden*, through which various routes passed, played an important role in these smuggling practices, which were never fully brought under control.

A third, and not the least important, motive was the often unspoken fear in the colonial administration that the local population would revolt against the repressive labour regime. Daendels himself was very aware of this danger, as can be seen from his response to resurgent restiveness in the area around Cirebon. This was only the most recent episode in a situation of continued turmoil in this region in the preceding years. The unrest flared up again when, in 1808, Daendels announced at the end of a tour of the Priangan the ordinance that essentially doubled the paddy tax. Although the report submitted to him on this local uprising blamed it on the terrorization of the rural population by Chinese moneylenders and traders, his own later account makes it clear that there were more reasons for the unrest (Daendels 1814: 23-4). What did not fail to shock

the authorities was that the peasants destroyed their coffee trees and set warehouses on fire. In 1806, a wandering band of robbers had murdered all the Chinese and a European inspector that they had encountered in the Cirebon highlands. The rebels rejected Lawick's offer to negotiate. Nicolaus Engelhard was summoned from Northeast Java to restore order. He did that not by taking military action, but by making concessions to the leaders of the revolt (*De Cirebonsche onlusten in 1807*: 148-51). In addition to permitting the deposed sultan to return to Cirebon and expelling the hated Chinese from the villages, he also allowed planters higher up in the sparsely settled hinterland to deliver the coffee closer to their homes. A primary concern in subduing this local revolt was to prevent it from spreading to the heart of the Priangan. One inevitable outcome of the unrest was the immediate introduction of stricter instructions for the police (De Haan IV, 1912: 876). It was up to the people themselves to ensure public order.

> To maintain peace and good order, the Inhabitants, of both the main Negorij and the respective Districts and Dessas, will be duty bound, in the District, Dessa or Campong to which they belong, both inside and outside, to keep a night watch, and to establish watch houses at appropriate distances from each other; said watches to begin in the evenings at six o'clock or at sunset and to end at six o'clock in the morning or at sunrise; and to conduct, from hour to hour, a round of the Campongs, Dessas, and of the Lord's roads (Daendels 1814, *Organique Stukken*, Cirebon, art. 10 of the *Policie en het Werk der Wegen en Posterijen*)

In this way, Java was transformed into a night-watch state in the most literal sense. The police regime introduced by Daendels would remain to the very end a typical feature of colonial domination in the archipelago.

The land rent system

The British takeover of the main Dutch domain in Asia brought a radical change of policy. Lieutenant-General Raffles, appointed by the East India Company as commander of Java and its dependencies, started off cautiously. He immediately set up a commission of inquiry in 1812, all the members of which except the chairman were Dutch officials who had transferred to his staff, to gather a wide range of information to prepare his intended reforms. The new order that had come to prevail abolished the government monopoly on trade in commodities and the compulsory deliveries (both of which were

aimed primarily at coffee production) and the corvee services, which were also founded on unpaid labour. This was replaced by a system in which peasants were free to use their land and labour as they chose. Based on the assumption that the state owned the land, in exchange for recognition of their right to till the land, the peasants had to relinquish part of their harvest by way of lease or rent. This system of land rent introduced by Raffles was similar to taxation systems enforced by the East India Company in its territories on the South Asian continent (in Bengal, but more specifically so in Madras and Bombay). The new system also closely resembled the ideas announced by Van Hogendorp around the turn of the century, which were partly inspired by his earlier stay in the British colony as a trading agent for the VOC. During his first appointment to the Council for Asian Possessions, Herman Muntinghe had had the opportunity to witness close up the exchange between Nederburgh and Van Hogendorp on the course of colonial policy. At that time, he felt the greatest affinity with the opinions of the former and his appointment as Daendels' secretary undoubtedly gave him the opportunity to express his opinions openly. As a member of Raffles' commission of inquiry, however, he again focused his attention on the ideas propagated earlier by Van Hogendorp regarding the introduction of a land tax. That line of thought displayed many parallels to the system envisaged by the English governor. Raffles showed exceptional interest in Van Hogendorp's ideas and even gave the order for the treatise in which the latter had outlined his proposals in 1799 to be translated.

The memorandum that Raffles published in 1814, *Substance of a Minute on the Introduction of an Improved System of Internal Management and the Establishment of a Land Rental on the Island of Java*, had an annex by Muntinghe. The essence of the annex was closely related to what his new superior had outlined and proposed in the previous pages. He had nothing but praise for Raffles' intention to do away with servitude and subordination. This entailed abolition of the compulsory cultivation of crops and of all feudal services that stood in the way of completely free agriculture and trade.[11]

Raffles expressed great appreciation for Muntinghe, who informed him of what liberal ideas had existed during the period of Dutch domination

11 Raffles based his opinion partly on those of his Dutch advisers. Together with J. Knops, Lawick wrote a memorandum arguing in favour of freedom of production and trade: Memorandum by J. Knops and Lawick on the possibilities of replacing the existing system of monopoly, compulsory deliveries and quotas on contemporary Java by one of free trade and free cultivation (NA, Van Alphen-Engelhard collection, 29 July 1812, 1916, 136.)

(Wright 1952: 236). The new Muntinghe rejected the customary portrayal of the character of the Javanese, exaggerating their inherent indolent and workshy nature. He denied that the indigenous population, though less civilized than Europeans, only had limited needs and did not strive for greater prosperity. In his view, Javanese peasants were perfectly able to pay a regular tax. Raffles himself suggested that their lack of energy, in as far as it existed, was partly a result of the exhausting climate, but even more due to a government that imposed excessive demands. Who, he asked himself, would not become impoverished and lazy when deprived of all rights of ownership and every opportunity to improve? More interesting is the view that both held of the colonial enterprise. According to Muntinghe, the administration should try and improve the situation of the indigenous population. He followed this statement immediately, however, with the observation that this effort was and remained naturally subordinate to a higher interest, namely 'that every Colony does or ought to exist for the benefit of the Mother-country'. In this respect, Raffles held a dissenting opinion. He made it clear that he gave priority, above all other concerns, to the welfare of the Javanese. Not only because this provided the best guarantee for increasing the colonial assets, but also as an aim in itself (1814: 14-6). This worthy ideal explains why, in his later historical account, Raffles was so outspokenly critical of the coffee regime in the Priangan Regencies. His decision not to apply his memorandum of 1814 to the Sunda highlands, however, runs directly contrary to this resolute opinion.

The Priangan region therefore remained excluded from the radical changes that the English Governor introduced during the British interlude in the political economy of the colony, both in the nature of the taxation and how it was collected. In his new set-up, the regents and their entourages in lands outside the Priangan no longer acted as mediators responsible for collecting the tax that the peasants had to pay the government, which varied with the size and quality of the cultivated fields. In these other parts of Java, the chiefs were relieved of their duties, allowed to keep their ranks and titles, and given a monetary reward to thank them for the services they had rendered. This was an important step in the de-feudalization of authority and the abolition of corvee services which was intended to contribute to this policy. There had been no lack of criticism of the regents and other members of the indigenous aristocracy during the Company period, but the establishment of a colonial state was accompanied by a more marked eclipse of this buffer layer between the government and the peasant order outside the Sundanese highlands. Rather than adding value to peasant production, they were now seen as living off it like parasites. The regents had

already shown their displeasure at their loss of autonomy under Daendels, who was only prepared to tolerate them in his own apparatus as executive and subordinate officials. In the system envisaged by Raffles, there was no place for them at all. Indigenous history was rewritten with the landed gentry playing the role of marionettes, appointed and dismissed according to the whim of the sovereign.

> It is established from every source of enquiry, that the Sovereign is Lord of the Soil; that lands are bestowed upon the several classes of chiefs and public officers provisionally or during pleasure; and that, with the exception of particular instances, where land is alienated for religious purposes or to the descendants of the reigning Dynasty, the actual property of the land is vested in the Prince: in short, that between the Sovereign and the cultivator there exists no actual right, and that the several intermediate officers, whether at the heads of districts, divisions, or towns, were nominated by the chief authority, removable at his pleasure, and possessing so little right of inheritance, that the descendants of men in high office were, in a few generations, found in poverty among the lower class of society. (Raffles 1814: 6)

Raffles believed that the Dutch regime had wrongly failed to maintain direct supervision of and contact with the peasant population, but his Dutch advisers warned him against acting too hastily and rigorously in sidelining the indigenous elite. Muntinghe informed his superior that, in revenge for the damage caused to their authority and prestige, the local chiefs might turn their discontent into actual rebellion. The fact that the regents still retained their policing responsibilities is an indication that the attempt to neutralize them was not very successful. More important was that, faced with a lack of financial resources, Raffles had to compensate chiefs who had lost their power by allocating them land that they could lease out to peasants. The inevitable consequence of this measure was the continuation of the customary cultivation and corvee services that the peasants had to perform for their lords. Nevertheless, the new system formally confirmed the exceptional position that the Sunda highlands had already held for many years.

On his arrival on Java, Raffles found the warehouses full to the brim with coffee. Sales had stagnated as a consequence of the blockade set up during the Napoleonic wars in continental Europe. The commodity that was intended to generate the lion's share of colonial profits had become as good as unmarketable and Raffles ordered the warehouse masters not to

accept any new deliveries. It remained possible to export small quantities to other markets, in America and elsewhere, and in ships sailing under the flag of one of the few countries that had succeeded in staying out of the conflict on the European continent. But the sharp fall in price this caused meant that Raffles lacked the income required to implement his radical reforms in any resolute way after taking power. The assurance of his confidant Thomas Macquoid, appointed as Inspector of the Cultivation of Coffee in the Priangan, that coffee cultivation in this region could be increased to any level he might wish, caused him to abolish the forced cultivation of this crop in all coastal areas to the east of Cirebon. Coffee, which had generated high profits for almost a century, had now become an uneconomic proposition for the colonial administration. The selling price had fallen below the fixed price that the peasants were paid on paper for the forced delivery of coffee. Nevertheless, Raffles insisted that his most important reason for freeing the population from this burden was their mass reluctance to continue growing it.

> Nearly the whole of the coffee gardens in the Eastern Districts were planted, during the administration of Marshal Daendels, by means of forced service; and in many instances, the gardens and even graves of the Javanese, were sacrificed in the general arrangement. From the period of the conquest, the people have, with difficulty, been forced to attend the plantations, and many of them had, long previous to their being given up by Government, run to decay: others from being in an improper soil, had failed altogether; and the measure of abolishing the establishment has perhaps, in point of time, superseded, but in a very trifling degree, the natural consequence which must have ensued, had the establishment been even continued on the former footing. (Raffles, Substance of a Minute 1814: 66-7)

In the Priangan Regencies, however, Raffles expressly maintained 'the system of vassalage and forced deliveries'. Elsewhere, the British authorities had offered no resistance to cessation of the planting of new coffee saplings. According to some sources, they even gave the order to stop maintenance in some of the gardens or even to chop down trees. This was reputedly the case in Cirebon. It was largely due to the efforts of Macquoid that the cultivation of coffee continued in Cianjur, the old stronghold of production. Although not unnoticed, the decline was much less disastrous here than elsewhere on Java. To maintain production at the required level, Macquoid drew up a new instruction for planting and maintaining coffee trees. He expressed

the opinion that, if forced cultivation was abolished in other parts of Java, production in the Priangan could be increased to far more than the volume achieved thus far. Raffles appeared to share his optimism. In his view, in light of the soon to be expected resumption of coffee export, the government had to show its willingness to pay the planters a fair and agreed price for their deliveries (1814: 175). This prognosis raises the question why Raffles failed to abolish forced cultivation in the Priangan Regencies, as he had in other production areas on the island. The not very convincing answer he provided in his later history of Java was that the Sundanese people had become accustomed to their state of servitude over the course of time and only tried to escape from it if the demands of forced cultivation rose to an excessive height.

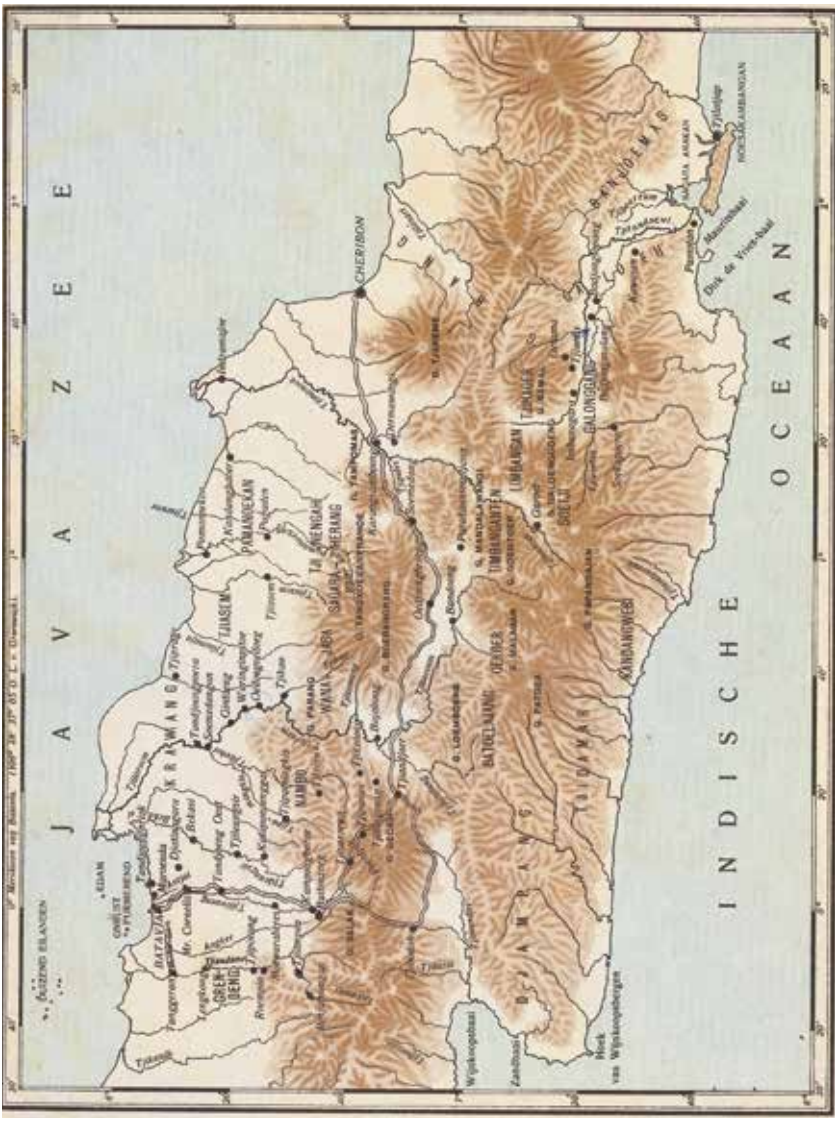
> A government of colonial monopolists, eager only for profit, and heedless of the sources from which it was derived, sometimes subjected its native subjects to distresses and privations, the recital of which would shock the ear of humanity. Suffice it to say, that the coffee culture in the Sunda districts has sometimes been so severely extracted, that together with the other constant and heavy demands made by the European authority on the labour of the country, they deprived the unfortunate peasants of the time necessary to rear food for their support. Many have thus perished by famine, while others have fled to the crags of the mountains, where raising a scant subsistence in patches of *ga*(*n*)*ga*, or oftener dependent for it upon the roots of the forest, they congratulated themselves on their escape from the reach of their oppressors. Many of these people, with their descendants, remain in these haunts to the present time: in their annual migration from hill to hill, they frequently pass over the richest lands, which still remain uncultivated and invite their return; but they prefer their wild independence and precarious subsistence, to the horrors of being again subjected to forced services and forced deliveries at inadequate rates. (Raffles I, 1830: 143-4)

The true reason was that Raffles could not do without the income from the forced cultivation to finance the expenditures his superiors had permitted themselves on taking over power on Java. The introduction of the free market and the integration of the West Javanese highlands in the colony-wide system would have to wait for better times to arrive. Another consideration that contributed to the unique nature of the region was the ban on the free movement of goods and persons, which the government maintained. The Chinese, whose presence Daendels had wanted to allow

in a controlled manner to stimulate economic activity, were under the English interim government as unwelcome as all other outsiders.[12] The coffee regime remained almost exclusively restricted to the Priangan Regencies. This meant that the British Governor continued the policy that had secured this part of the island in an exceptional position. Daendels had consolidated and intensified this system, but its main characteristics – the forced cultivation and delivery of coffee by peasants under the supervision of their own chiefs rather than colonial officials – were already visible in the early eighteenth century. This exception to the political economy that applied in the rest of Java became even more distinct with the introduction of the land rent system. By adhering stubbornly to how it had once begun, the Sunda highlands were designated as a major enclave within the larger colonial domain. To quote De Haan yet again: 'almost every reform stalled at the Priangan border' (I, 1910: 449).

12 'No Chinaman, Malay, or other native, not an inhabitant of the Regencies, shall be permitted to go off the great road leading from one head-negree to another, and in case any are found in the campongs, they shall be immediately apprehended and sent up to Buitenzorg. Chinamen, Malays and other natives, not inhabitants of the Regencies, found there without a pass, shall be instantly taken into custody.' (De Haan IV, 1912: 876)

Plate I Regional map of Priangan regencies in the early twentieth century



Source: F. de Haan – Priangan, vl. 1

Plate II Map from 1778 of the Priangan highlands under direct control of the VOC. The eastern regencies Sumedang and Surakarta were still claimed by the princely state of Cirebon on the north coast.

Source: NA

Plate III Marriage procession in the Salak valley. Painting by A. Salm (1872). Colour lithograph by J.C. Greive Jr.

Source: KITLV Collection

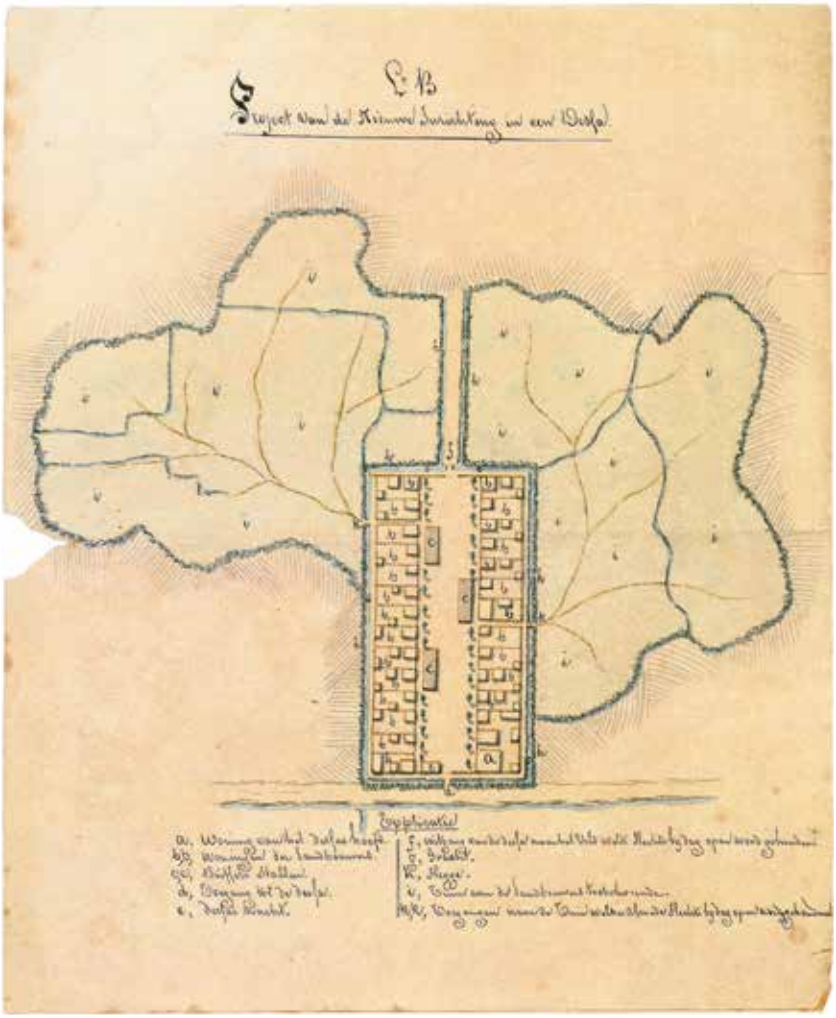
Plate IV Moonlit landscape near Sumedang. Painting by A. Salm (1872). Colour lithograph by J.C. Greive Jr.

Source: KITLV Collection

Plate V **Posthumous portrait of H.W. Daendels by Saleh (1838). The Governor-General is pointing on a map to the Great Trunk Road, near Megamemdung mountain in the Priangan regencies. The construction of this *Jalan Pos* led to the deaths of many thousands of forced corvee labourers. P. Engelhard noted that laying the section across this mountain alone cost the lives of 500 men recruited from a nearby regency.**

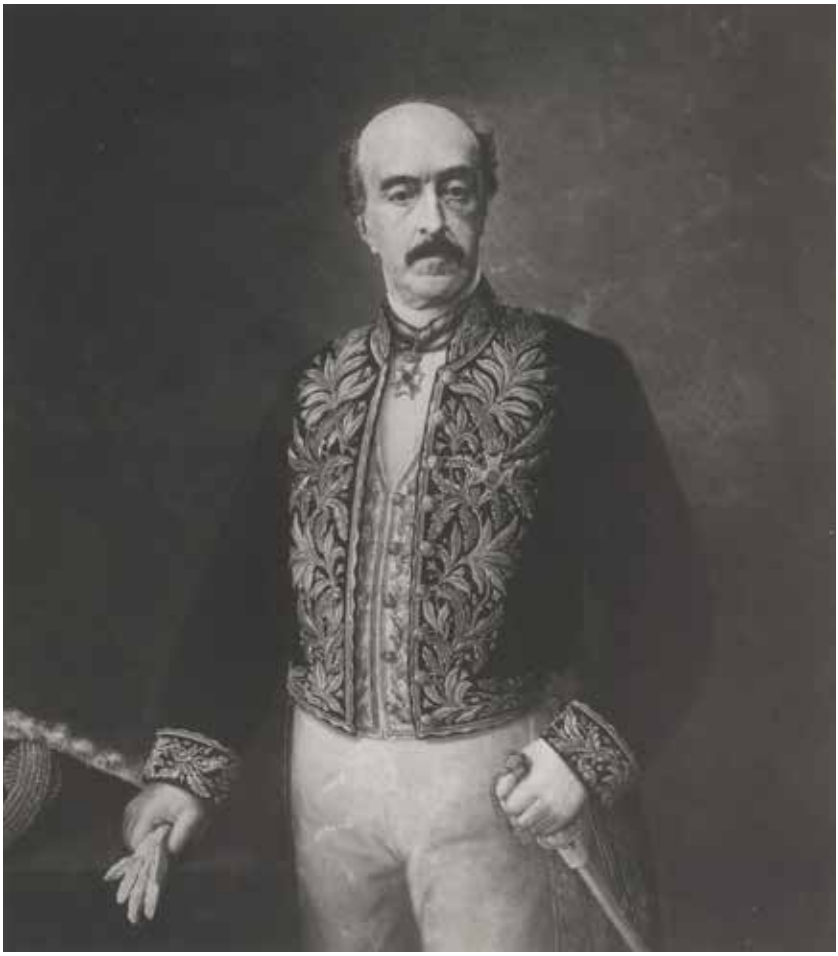
Source: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Plates VI and VII **Two drawings of the village on Java. The first shows the unregulated lay-out, as was commonly found, and the second the planned 'barrack' design. The blueprint of the model village was designed by Van Sevenhoven a few years after the introduction of the cultivation system.**



Source: NA

Plate VIII Portrait of O. van Rees as Governor-General (1884-88)



Source: KITLV Collection

IV Government regulated exploitation versus private agribusiness

Discovery of the village system

As legitimate successor to the kings on Java, Raffles decreed that the peasants had to pay rent to the state for the land they tilled. The initial intention was to give responsibility for collecting the tax to the *demang*, *bekel* and *loerah*, the lowest level of indigenous chiefs who, as petty landlords, were closest to the agrarian population. They were in charge of collecting the tribute that had to be paid by the landowning households of each peasant locality in money or in kind. The Lieutenant-General changed his mind, however, when he received new information suggesting that the people in various parts of Java were certainly no strangers to the notion of agrarian property. The information came from officials who had gained experience with the introduction of the *ryotwari* system in the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay in British India. Under this system of land rule, individual peasants were recognized as the primary targets of taxation. Some members of the inquiry committee sent out by Raffles to investigate the tribute levied from the peasantry had already established earlier that individual property was also known in West Java. In addition, they determined that only the inhabitants of a settlement were permitted to lay claim to the waste land around it (Bastin 1954: 57). The report on land rights that J. Knops submitted to Raffles noted that peasants who cultivated dry land to grow rice were considered the individual owners of the fields.

> The Javanese who clears such lands from the root of trees, brushwood, &c., and renders a wilderness fit for cultivation, considers himself as proprietor of the same, and especially as owner of what it produces, on which no taxes are levied. These lands admit of cultivation every second year only, which, however, is no loss to the proprietor, whose [next] harvest is more abundant in consequence. (Raffles 1814: 131)

The rights of ownership also extended to the trees that the peasant planted and excluded all imposition of taxes. The Lieutenant-General concluded from these new findings that peasants had at least the right to usage of the fields they tilled. He could not permit himself to ignore the sovereign right of the government to the land, as the colonial administration and

its right to impose taxes were founded on this principle. Raffles assumed that he had discovered the traditional structure of Javanese rural society: a community of peasants with an advanced degree of control over their own agrarian resources, which had been best preserved in areas the furthest removed from the courts of the kings.

The feudal structure that had replaced this system in the more recent past under despotic Muslim rule had rendered the old community institutions obsolete. Raffles saw it as his duty to restore the primacy of community authority and to respect the rights of the people of Java to use the land as they saw fit. This led him to propose a new, more detailed regulation based on a head tax for all landowners and issuing them with deeds of ownership. Properly introducing the land rent system required not only a much more extensive apparatus than Raffles had at his disposal, but also the creation of a very detailed system of land tenure for the registration of property rights, a survey of land use and other data on the structure of peasant production. It was a task that far exceeded the existing capacity of the colonial administration. Raffles was aware of this problem and, as an interim solution, introduced a *desa*-based land rent. The *demang*, *bekel* and *loerah* were still the linchpins of this system. But, where they had previously been seen as landlords in their own right who, commissioned as agents of the government, were responsible for collecting the land rent, they were now attributed the role of local headmen, acting as intermediaries between the peasants and the colonial bureaucracy. Raffles himself underlined the importance of this reversal of authority (1814: 115). In the new interpretation, the village headmen were seen as the first among equals and peasant households were accustomed to choosing the best candidates from among their own ranks democratically through annual elections. Raffles issued orders for this 'traditional custom', which he saw as having been destroyed by the despotic rule of the kings, to be restored. By taking this step, he was undoubtedly motivated by the desire to break the concentration of power in the hands of a small supra-local gentry. The designation of the village head as the collector of taxes also suited the goal of keeping the costs of administration to a minimum. As a reward for their mediation, the village heads were exempted from paying land rent, were allocated official fields from the village lands, and the right to lay claim to the labour services that peasants still had to provide.

In this way, the village head, assisted by other members of the village council, became the focal point of the land rent administration until regulations could be introduced that were directed at the peasant households individually. The reforms initiated by Raffles gave a powerful boost to the

idea of an 'original' form of village autonomy, the restoration of which was a high priority for the colonial rulers. Yet this early source, from which the existence of a local community of peasants is derived, contains numerous features that cast doubt on the alleged close-knit nature of this social formation. For example, it was common for peasant households belonging to the same lord to live at some considerable distance from each other. Another factor that sheds doubt on the institutional self-sufficiency of the settlements is their minuscule size. The 734 villages surveyed in the two regencies of Bandung and Cianjur during the British interlude had an average of 39 inhabitants (Bastin 1954: 81). The settlements on the northern coastal plain were a little larger but here, too, the number of huts was never more than a few dozen. Their small scale must have imposed limits on the autonomy and autarchy of these settlements.

In a number of respects and in a very short time, therefore, Raffles radically revised his original design. This rapid turnabout is illustrated by the fact that Crawfurd, the most senior member of his staff, claimed confidently in an early report 'that there is not an acre of land in the country to which the shadow of hereditary right or title could be made', while a year later, he opened a memorandum on the situation in Cirebon by declaring with equal aplomb 'that the right of private property in the soil is generally acknowledged and tolerably well understood'. Raffles' comment on this latter observation was that, in areas far removed from the courts of the despotic rulers, such as West Java, the old community institutions must have remained intact. This explanation is especially inaccurate regarding Cirebon, a centre of sultanate power where Islam gained a foothold at an early stage. These changing opinions on what the 'original' situation had been and where it had been preserved most purely displayed a lack of knowledge of both the present and the past. Moreover, the interpretation derived from these opinions was not based on any intrinsic interest in the country and its people but primarily in satisfying the immediate ambitions and interests of the colonial ruler. The promise to restore a vanished past was adjusted so as to be as much as possible in harmony with these ends (Breman 1979).

Raffles did make a greater effort than his predecessors to gather intelligence that was relevant for policy. Daendels had made a start by ordering accurate maps to be drawn and by drafting a survey in 1809 for all districts on the basis of 21 questions that the inspectors of the coffee cultivation in the Priangan Regencies were made to answer first (Van 't Veer 1963: 134). But, like many more of his directives, the quality of their implementation left much to be desired. That his English successor took a more systematic

approach became immediately clear when he appointed a heavy-duty committee of inquiry. The report the committee produced was not only more comprehensive than all earlier exercises of this kind, but also of a much higher quality. Nevertheless, this 'statistical' record also contained many flaws and spurious facts. In addition to the tendency, already referred to, to report findings that supported pre-conceived administrative intentions, the members of the committee were also given far too little time to do their inventory work thoroughly. The great effort that it took them to travel meant that they hardly penetrated inland and, even on the coastal plain, only visited the most accessible places. It was rarely possible for them to spend more than one day in each regency, according to the committee chairman. Another problem was their lack of command of the language. With one exception, none of the committee members were able to talk directly with the people living in the area they were investigating. Translating the questions and answers from English into Dutch, Malay and, lastly, Javanese was extremely cumbersome. As the committee only had a limited number of writers and translators, and of dubious competence, a large amount of information must have been recorded incorrectly or lost. Furthermore, the submissiveness of the ordinary peasantry towards their superiors made it impossible to ask people to give their opinions frankly and freely. When the chairman of the committee complained to his Dutch fellow members that the West Javanese regents were so reluctant to give him information, they advised him not to attach too much value to what they had to say anyway (Bastin 1954: 125).

The closer the colonial government came to the peasant's habitat, the greater was the need for more knowledge on its structure and *modus operandi*. Also interesting is the attempt to bring some kind of order into this multiplicity of widely varying facts by deploying insights derived from colonial rule over peasantries elsewhere in Asia. It was of course no coincidence that, under Raffles, reports on the native population in British India became an important source of inspiration in getting to grips with the social structure and culture on Java. Neither Daendels nor Raffles held their posts for longer than three years. But the reforms that they initiated laid the foundations for an early-colonial state that did not develop to the full until after they had departed again. The impact they left behind therefore by far outweighed the duration of their governance on Java. Raffles had to justify the costs of the occupation of the colony and to persuade his lukewarm superiors in Calcutta that the domain he had acquired could be extremely profitable. As already noted, this was one of the main reasons for him to exclude the Priangan Regencies from the new system of taxation. Rather than paying land rent, the people here had to continue delivering coffee

to the government, as before. The forced cultivation of this perennial crop also meant that the authority of the regents in the Sundanese highlands remained unaffected. The difference between this and the regulations that Raffles had introduced in the other parts of Java, a difference that had already started to emerge in the time of Daendels, exposed the separate place that the Priangan region occupied in the system of colonial exploitation.

The continuation of what was in effect the coffee regime of the VOC did not generate the great profits that Raffles needed. He himself attributed the disappointing results to the costs of production, including transport to the market, which were twice as high as the selling price had been in recent years. He added to this that the planters received an unreasonably low price for their labour (Raffles 1814: 67). It is a telling comment on the gigantic rise in price that took place from the moment of delivery to the government's warehouses inland to the arrival of the coffee on the coast. This increase, we can conclude, disappeared almost exclusively into the pockets of a series of indigenous and European intermediaries. The fall in the selling price was a consequence of the British blockade of continental Europe for overseas products during the Napoleonic wars. The stagnating sales not only kept the prices down but also resulted in overfull warehouses. At first supply continued to rise as a consequence of the large-scale planting of trees in new production area on Daendels' orders. The response to the overproduction was exactly the same as in the earliest history of coffee cultivation on Java: mass extirpation of trees which, in some areas, led to the complete destruction of the crop. Peasants who had to deliver their harvest without receiving any payment at all did this on their own initiative. Rather than taking action to combat this dereliction of duty, the government even offered its silent collaboration (Van der Kemp 1916: 129). After production had fallen from 116,648 *pikul* in 1810 to 21,348 *pikul* in 1811 as a result of the stagnation in sales, this was compensated for a year later with a doubling of the much reduced volume. In the next two years, the recovery remained at this level, while in 1815, it rose to 60,186 *pikul*. That this improvement was considered likely to continue in the years after that can be concluded from Raffles' decision in 1813 to plant more than two to three million new trees in Priangan. Still, it would take great efforts to restore the number of trees lost to their former level.

Land sale

There was another way of raising money for running expenses, namely auctioning off estates together with the peasants who lived and worked

on them. Before Raffles, Daendels had taken refuge in the same solution and had in this way made himself master of a large domain around Bogor (De Haan I, 1910: 475-6). Anyone examining these affairs more closely will quickly realize that, as well as the colony's budgetary crisis, this speculative deal was also motivated by the self-interest of the Governor-General and a small circle of top-ranking officials. Assisted by his personal physician, Andries de Wilde, Daendels had become the owner of extensive estates in the Priangan foothills. In Bogor, he had a palace built, which he used as his official residence. The part of his possessions that he did not need to demonstrate his seigneurial status, Daendels sold back to the government for a much higher amount than he had paid for it. These fraudulent transactions made him a wealthy man. Raffles followed the example of his predecessor and entered into business relationships with De Wilde, who had served as a coffee inspector in Bandung under Macquoid, the Resident in the Priangan together with Macquoid himself and with former Commissioner Nicolaus Engelhard. These gentlemen became shareholders in the purchase of land in the Sukabumi region of West Priangan, which had hardly been opened up. Their plan was to set up large-scale agribusinesses to grow coffee and other commercial crops. This led to the opening up of an enormous privatized enclave in the Sunda highlands. Accused of abusing his office, Raffles hastily sold his share, mostly to De Wilde. But, unlike Daendels, he was punished for the malpractice of using his official position for his own enrichment. Raffles was suspended as Lieutenant-Governor and, shortly before the restoration of Dutch rule, was called back to the headquarters of the East India Company in Calcutta.

The solution that Raffles thought he had found to the country's financial problems was therefore the same as that devised by Daendels, namely to sell off land to private men of business. The purchase price included use of the labour power of the peasants who lived on the land under the same terms that applied to government-controlled land. The urgent need for revenues to keep the colonial apparatus running was the direct reason for taking this step. An important contributing factor in the background, however, was an instruction that Lord Minto, Governor-General of the East India Company in South Asia, left behind for his subordinate after a short visit to Java immediately after the transfer of power. The instruction ordered Raffles to dismantle the feudal system and to replace it with a form of governance that was less oppressive and left more scope for private interest. Minto's suggestion to radically change the basis of the political economy on Java was largely aimed at agrarian production for trade, and export in particular. The order from higher up was to exercise moderation at first in

introducing the new policy and not to be too hasty. Landed estates should not be sold off on a grand scale but leased, and then only for a limited period. Acute need of money most probably prompted Raffles not to pay too much heed to this prudent advice. As mentioned earlier, private estates were not unknown on Java, having arisen during the Company era. Most of them were on the coast, not too far from Batavia. In the course of time, however, they had spread to other parts of the island, although most of the newer estates were also to be found on in the coastal plain. Raffles' orders were also focused on these areas already well-acquainted with agribusiness under non-indigenous management. Under his governance, however, more concessions were also granted in the higher parts inland.

When he issued his instruction to give more scope to private initiatives in the promotion of agribusiness, Minto noted that a lack of capital and capitalists would probably pose an obstacle to this policy (Bastin 1954: 16-7). One social category, however, had shown its ability to engage in the required capitalist behaviour: the Chinese minority that, as traders and moneylenders, had a long-standing record of interaction with the peasant population. The most successful of them had worked their way up to be tax farmers for the king and the landed gentry, but not without acquiring a reputation for exploiting the common people. Among the Chinese were also those who had established themselves as the owners or managers of private estates. It was therefore not surprising that there was great interest from the Chinese in Raffles' plans to increase production and expand the agrarian tax base by issuing land to private parties. After all, Minto himself had expressed his hope of internal capital accumulation. Yet Raffles was reticent about alienating land temporarily or permanently to the Chinese, largely due to what his Dutch advisers had told him about their pernicious practices. In his final memorandum of 1814, the Lieutenant-General compared the simplicity of the Javanese peasant to the chicanery of the Chinese tax farmers or toll collectors. The unrest in Cirebon, which flared up at regular intervals, would most certainly have contributed to the unfavourable opinion of these non-native landowners. The people of the region had become so antagonistic to the presence of the Chinese that the latter were no longer permitted to lease land there, a ban that was imposed in other parts of the island for the same reasons. This meant that only Europeans were eligible for concessions to set up large-scale agribusinesses. It was Raffles' Dutch officials who urged him to promote the formation of a class of white settlers by issuing land on a large scale. In this context, it is important to note that the option of encouraging the emergence of an indigenous class of entrepreneurs was hardly considered, if at all. The Javanese elite had a

reputation for leading a parasitical existence and for showing no interest at all in actively practising agriculture, while the large mass of peasants were believed to possess neither the means nor the energy. The following passage from the report that Rothenbühler, as a member of the committee of inquiry, submitted to Raffles in 1812 illustrates the lack of confidence the majority of colonial policy-makers had in the economic disposition of the common cultivator.

> I am convinced that if once the Javanese has land in his possession & is left to himself without any restriction, he will not work any more than is absolutely necessary for him & his family, whose wants are besides of very little consequence – a poor bamboo house covered with ... leaves, a handkerchief & some few cloths for him & his wife, & a small quantity of rice or Turkey-corn boiled in water, with some vegetables, & sometimes a small quantity of fish, this is all ... he wants. Lazy by nature, & effeminate by education, the Javanese seems only to exist to live in indolence, occupying himself ... by sleeping or sitting alongside a river, contemplating the current of the water, or if he is inclined, taking some fish for his dinner without ever feeling the desire to ameliorate his fate by work.(Bastin 1954: 65)

Notwithstanding the sale of land that Raffles was forced to resort to by pressure of circumstances, he pursued a statist policy that ran contrary to the transfer of either responsibilities or authority from the government to private entrepreneurs. He persisted in his refusal to change Java into an agrarian society in which the local population would be left at the mercy of white landowners to be used as a mere labour commodity. The colonization by Europeans continued under his rule, but went much less far than his advisers, who included many old hands of the former Dutch civil service, would have wished.

Raffles' policy in favour of the peasantry did not change the fact that he belonged to a batch of colonial administrators who never lost sight of their own interests and even allowed their decisions to be determined by them. They were part of a power clique of high-ranking officials who, since the VOC era, had been renowned for the shamelessness with which they in the first place filled their own pockets. They were called to order by the highest authority only if they exceeded the very porous margins of what was considered acceptable degrees of fraud and corruption. This fate befell Pieter Engelhard, for example, who was relieved of his post as Commissioner of Indigenous Affairs in the early nineteenth century. Earlier accusations of extortion played a role in his ultimate dismissal. But these well-founded

suspicions were no obstacle at all to him continuing his career in the service of the colonial state. His case is a random example of the protection and preferential treatment that were customarily enjoyed by those who held lucrative positions. Old friendships and family connections were also invaluable. The colonial power complex could be divided into a number of factions: old guard and newcomers, 'conservatives' and 'liberals', reformers and anti-reformers. Sometimes, though by no means always, these dividing lines coincided. But their mutual differences of opinion did not prevent them from forming a united front when it came to the quest for personal profit. In that respect, they were more competitors than opponents. While writing his work on a new fundament for colonial rule, Dirk van Hogendorp was preoccupied with accumulating a personal fortune to enable him to continue to lead the opulent life to which he had become accustomed as the highest ranking official on Java's East Coast (Fassseur 1985: 214). Daendels was not only a forbidding governor but also an astute businessman who allotted himself state property for a bargain only to sell it back for ten times the original price. Lastly, Raffles made a good show of himself. As mentioned before, De Wilde was happy to take over Raffles' share when his involvement in the shady land deal became public knowledge and he hastily withdrew from the partnership. As the main owner, De Wilde would eventually develop Sukabumi. Other members of Raffles' entourage also acquired estates at a bargain. Lawick, Knops, Rothenbühler, Von Winckelmann, Van Motman and Muntinghe – the man who declared that colonial revenues should first and foremost benefit the mother country – were among those who owned splendid domains in Krawang. The plantations on sale were so extensive that only 'capitalists' could take part in the auction. This scarce category proved to be strikingly well-represented among those holding the highest public positions (Bastin 1954: 76-88). The white *kongsi* on Java displayed all the typical behavioural traits of the British *nabobs* in India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the state of opulence in which they lived, their unbridled but vulgar greed for money, their conspicuous leisure and ostentation, a social strategy in which ties of kinship and patronage played an important role, etc. (see for example Moorhouse 1983: 40-2, 56; Woodruff 1963). The removal of regents and other indigenous chiefs from their positions of power in the early nineteenth century in most parts of Java was accompanied by criticism of the feudal lifestyle of this aristocracy, who were branded as a plague on the country and its people. The directors and lower-ranking expatriate staff of the civil service behaved no less parasitically, but the self-enrichment of this caste of white officials was rarely a matter of discussion.

The colonial hierarchy tolerated little criticism from within, while the tendency to present a united front towards outsiders also did little to encourage a free and frank exchange of opinion. Yet the transition from trading company to state enterprise did seem to have contributed to a very gradual change in the code of conduct. Compared to the servants of the VOC, who sought to maximize their own profit with little ado or embarrassment, their successors as state officials at least tried to deny or conceal the fact that they were acting in any way other than in the public interest, no matter how it was defined. Once they had been found guilty of misconduct, it was more difficult for the new generation of administrators to restore their earlier reputation for honour and integrity. Raffles lost his job prematurely partly as a result of his abuses in the sale of land, while Daendels, after being accused of financial misconduct, was not permitted to return to Java as Governor-General in 1816. The higher requirements that were progressively imposed on those in positions of authority did not of course mean that these new public morals were introduced without problems but, compared with the previous regime, violations were tolerated less easily and punished more severely. This was a change that helped mark the advent of the colonial state. Behind the dividing lines that separated the old and new administration of the colony around the turn of the nineteenth century, however, lay a continuity that can also be seen in the career profiles of the administrators. Many of the old guard simply transferred their loyalties to the new masters, no matter whether they were Patriots or Orangists (monarchists), or were – in succession – Dutch, French or English. These old retainers not only followed all the swerves and curves of policy, but claimed that they had always been fierce supporters of the new course. Muntinghe was perhaps the ultimate personification of this flexibility, according to the derisive judgment of his contemporary and rival Willem van Hogendorp, who described him as 'at all times the obedient servant and cowardly follower of whoever holds the reins of power' (Van der Kemp 1916: 34-5). After having worn out Nederburgh and Daendels, Muntinghe became a great favourite of Raffles, who praised him as his right-hand man. After the departure of the English high command, he patiently awaited the restoration of Dutch authority in the firm belief that it would once again make use of his standing as a man of all colonial seasons.

In search of a new policy

The fall of the Napoleonic empire ended in a major realignment of the multinational state structure on the European continent. At the Vienna

conference in 1815, the combined diplomacy of Britain and Prussia saw to it that the territorial aspirations that had magnified the role of France in the wake of the 1789 Revolution were revoked. As part of the policy of containment, the United Netherlands were cut off from political allegiance to their southern neighbour and reconstituted in a new monarchy. A son of the last princely *stadtholder* Willem V from the Orange-Nassau dynasty, who had taken refuge in Britain, invested himself in 1815 as King Willem I of the newly formed state in northwest Europe. I shall first discuss the repercussions for colonial governance and in a final paragraph at the end of this chapter, briefly comment on the changes in the political setting in the metropolis.

Back in Holland from his years of exile, Willem I appointed three Commissioners-General and gave them orders to come up with proposals for a new colonial policy. At the instigation of the chairman, Muntinghe was not included among the candidates. He had, after all, joined the ranks of the occupier after the British takeover. In the foreword to his work on Java and its people, published in 1817, Raffles thanked his prominent adviser profusely for the services rendered.[13] This praise raised doubts about the impartiality of this undeniably expert and experienced man. Baron Godert van der Capellen was new to colonial affairs and had been appointed chairman exactly because of his unblemished record. This lack of familiarity with the situation in the colony also applied, though to a lesser extent, to Cornelis Elout, the second and most prominent member of the trio in terms of rank. Elout had been sent to Java earlier, in 1806, on a similar mission but it had been recalled before reaching Batavia. The third Commissioner was a nondescript figure who soon faded into the background. With these choices, the King made it clear that he did not trust the old guard. Others who were not considered were Dirk van Hogendorp and Daendels, whose track records worked against them. The trio of Commissioners departed from

13 The publication of The History of Java (1817) immediately incurred the displeasure of the colonial policy-makers. They accused the author of having political motives and questioned whether British rule had indeed left such a favourable impression on the Javanese as Raffles had suggested. Just to be sure, the author of an official memorandum warned that it was advisable to see to it that the indigenous leaders of Java did not become familiar with the work '… to ensure that the flattering way in which the Javanese are presented does not encourage them to develop ideas that may be disadvantageous to the crucial importance of a good relationship with the inland rulers.' (S. van Deventer I, 1865: 270). Fear that the British Governor had left behind an overly favourable impression did not prevent later colonial authors from expressing their undisguised admiration for Raffles. As M.L. van Deventer wrote at the end of the nineteenth century: 'At the pinnacle of the history of Java in our century stands a foreigner, with his system, his sensible designs, and the introduction of his radical reforms.' (1890: 16)

Texel at the end of October 1815, arriving six months later in Batavia. This gave them plenty of opportunity to discuss their mission on board, armed with an instruction issued before they left and a government regulation drawn up on the basis of a draft charter dating from 1803. The question the Commissioners had to address was whether to adopt the principles of free cultivation and free labour that the British administration had introduced or to return to the previous regime of a captive peasantry and forced cultivation and deliveries of export crops. Van der Capellen showed himself to be a cautious man and had already informed the King before his departure of his doubts about the feasibility of implementing the liberal ideas that formed the core of the government regulation drawn up in 1815 regarding the Asian possessions in the near future. The 'liberal ideas' boiled down to the instruction to put an end to the regime of coercion and monopoly that dated back to the VOC era. What was to replace this remained unclear for the time being. In the period of trial and error that now commenced, there was no avoiding the need for practical arrangements to be made in a number of areas. The most important of these was the decision to accept or reject the principle of tax collection introduced by Raffles, henceforth referred to as the land rent system. The decision had to be made without the Commissioners having the opportunity to give thorough consideration to the advantages and disadvantages. The *Raad van Financiën* (Financial Affairs Council) argued in favour of retaining the land rent system. That was by no means surprising, as its president was Muntinghe, who had contributed prominently to Raffles' design for its promulgation. His reservations about a village-based system of collection – he referred to the *ryotwari* settlements introduced in western India – were practical in nature and required further investigation to seek a solution. The recommendations that Muntinghe submitted to the Commissioners-General on 11 July 1817 gave primary importance to coffee cultivation which, as one of the cheapest forms of state income, had to be maintained.

Muntinghe gave two answers to the question as to how that was to be achieved. He observed that the only way for the government to secure its supplies under conditions of free cultivation and delivery was to pay a good price. Conversely, if the price of labour was set too low, coercion would be imperative. Muntinghe recalled that the VOC had engaged in free trade when it first arrived, and that supply was adequate because the suppliers received a reasonable price. He opposed the claim that the Javanese lacked the virtues required for any other system than forced labour and warned against the costs of enforcing such a coercive system, which should not be ignored in calculating the advantages and disadvantages. Is it conceivable,

he argued, to enforce people to plant and tend to 72 million coffee trees and to deliver 35 to 36 million pounds of coffee without fear of unrest, desertion, rebellion or some other form of calamity and thereby, in the long run, bringing about the downfall of the regime? What would happen, Muntinghe wondered, if a Dutch farmer were forced to supply his produce at half, or a quarter or a tenth part of the real value? Certainly, the Javanese became slow and unwilling as soon as they were forced to work for others and under supervision. Yet behind this lethargy was the zeal and enlightened self-interest that drove every simple peasant. Muntinghe described these qualities in lyrical terms (Van Deventer I, 1865: 319).

This advocate of free labour also referred to the system of village-level governance that had so conveniently come to light during the period of British rule. The village headman was supposedly elected by the inhabitants of the locality in rotation and was given responsibility for representing the interests of the community. Muntinghe called on the European authorities to make use of this institution, which had existed since time immemorial, to interact with the peasantry. With the village council, the government had an instrument that was 'like a clog, tractable enough to take on any form that a benevolent and compassionate government may wish to give it' (Muntinghe, in Van Deventer I, 1865: 331). In the regulation governing the collection of the land rent, issued at the start of 1814, the village headman was already identified as the agent in matters regarding the tribute imposed on the locality. Raffles had discarded his original intention to impose a land tax on the cultivating households individually for practical reasons. Instead, he introduced a system of taxes per village, with the headman of the *desa* acting as the intermediary, 'renting' the land from the government and responsible for parcelling it out to the peasants for cultivation. The Commission-General decided to maintain this regulation. The recognition of the village council and its designation as the lowest level of administration dated from this period. It completed the 'descent' of the exercise of power to the colonial workfloor, a system that would remain intact until the end of Dutch rule. The village headmen, charged with collecting the land tax, were considered the representatives of the peasant households. Their periodic election by the villagers from their midst was formal confirmation of their status. This was considered an 'ancient custom' on Java, which had been brought to an end by despotic rulers and reinstated by Raffles.

In 1818, the Commission-General issued an instruction that made this interpretation, based on the discovery of a past that had never existed (Van der Kemp 1916: 362-4; Breman 1979 and 1987a), normal practice for the largest part of Java that fell under the land rent system. To facilitate supervision

of the newly appointed local tax agents, Raffles' Revenue Instruction included a provision that each village council should keep a record of the amount of tax levied and how it was distributed among the villagers, but little had come of this provision in practice (Van der Kemp 1916: 43-4). As a consequence, the Land-Rent Inspectorate had no idea at all of how much cultivable land there was in each village or what crops were grown on it, in total or per household. Land registers would not be initiated until much later, unlike in British India, where the classification of landownership, known as survey and settlement records, had been introduced on a large scale from the early nineteenth century. The colonial authorities on Java had little other choice for the time being than to determine a reasonable collective tax in consultation with the village councils. This procedure, known as the admodiation system, generally entailed rather unpredictable negotiations, usually conducted with the intercession of the gentry. After many expressions of praise and much bargaining, the result was often a far too low or excessively high estimate. The latter could lead to peasant protests which, as happened on the coastal plain around Cirebon, could escalate into a full-scale popular revolt. The collective tax imposed through the village council, in cash or agrarian produce or a combination of the two, was therefore a continuation of the system which had been initiated in earlier years under British rule. It was a pro-bureaucratic and anti-feudal style of administration. Nonetheless, the Commission-General did rescind Raffles' decision not to depend on the landed gentry as an intermediate layer between the government and the peasant order. Van der Capellen proved to be very much aware of the resistance of the nobility to their exclusion and took this into account. Muntinghe made general recommendations for the cultivation of coffee, proposing no measures that would apply solely to the Priangan region. He pointed out that, from Cirebon to the east, 20 million trees had been lost in 1812-13 during the British interlude due to negligence or wilful destruction. He added that the government should lease the remaining coffee plantations on the northeast coast to the Javanese for free cultivation. A general inspectorate would be established to supervise cultivation and to encourage the peasants to grow crops, in particular coffee, for the European market.

The deregulation of coffee cultivation, except in the Priangan

It was clear advice, but the Commissioners-General did not implement it for the time being. A few days after receiving the report from the President

of the *Raad van Financiën*, they left for a four-month tour of inspection through Java. The purpose of the tour was to make site visits, starting in Cirebon, to see for themselves how the land rent and coffee cultivation ordinances worked in practice. Before returning to Batavia at the end of 1817, the Commissioners-General issued a statement about this main export commodity. This interim measure, announced on 7 November of that year, had a clear liberal intent. Coffee planters could lease land at a reasonable price and were free to work on it as they saw fit. They were also promised that they would be protected against abuse of their rights. The Priangan Regencies were however explicitly excluded. The Commission-General simply stated that coffee growing in this main production area should continue as before. This outcome was intended to be a temporary compromise as Van der Capellen considered it inconsistent to allow a system to exist in part of Java that was based on principles contrary to the rest of the island. In exchange for being exempt from land rent, the people in the Priangan were obligated to grow coffee and deliver it to the government's warehouses for a small reimbursement. In other words, everything remained the same as it had been before. Van der Capellen offered his apologies for maintaining this exceptional situation in a letter to minister Anton Falck in 1816 (Van der Kemp 1916: 189-90).

There was no village autonomy nor elected village headmen in the Sunda lands. The regents continued to wield the power once bestowed upon them by the VOC. The forced cultivation of coffee thus continued in this part of Java. Not on the basis of persuasive argumentation, admittedly, but for the same practical reasons that Nederburgh, Van Hogendorp, Daendels and Raffles had appealed to in their turn. The continued isolation of the Priangan Regencies from the outside world was part of this policy. An ordinance to cordon off the region was issued once more in 1820, following complaints in the preceding years of coffee being smuggled from the highlands to the coast, where it was brought at a much higher price to the market. That this illicit trade was conducted more by the gentry than by simple peasants is illustrated by an official demand to the Residents of Priangan and Cirebon in 1819 to warn the local chiefs about the unacceptability of such practices.

The Commissioners-General now gave priority to introducing the land rent system. The first article of this decree, announced in mid-March 1818, was that the land rent would be collected at village level. It was hoped that, with the appointment of Lawick as Inspector-General and H.J. van de Graaff as Deputy Inspector-General of Land-Rent Revenues, the future could be faced with confidence. Of course, many instructions followed on the further elaboration of the system that was to be in force for most of the

island. There was however no adequate explanation of why the Priangan lands, and not elsewhere, should remain the epicentre of coffee production. The only reference to the continued apartheid of the region was the explicit instruction that the state of affairs that was soon to be introduced in the rest of the island did not apply to this traditional centre of coffee cultivation. The persistent exceptional position attributed to the Priangan was the result of a compromise. The colonial policy-makers wanted the maximum volume of coffee at the lowest possible price. Not complying with the ideals of enlightenment that had blown over from Europe may have been a little awkward, but if coercion was necessary to increase the cultivation of this most important export crop, then so be it. The enormous profits that the forced supply of coffee generated were now easily defended with the argument that the non-economic behaviour of the Javanese peasant – or more accurately, the Priangan peasant – did not permit his freedom of action. The low rung of civilization on which these people lived justified the postponement of their freedom until a later date. The only way to help them on the road to progress was to restrict their freedom of action. Moreover, this was a regime that they were familiar with from their time under the rule of the Javanese kings. This reasoning provided the fundament for an ideology on which colonial domination would rest until the very end.

Based on the findings gathered during its long tour and on the study of memoranda and other documents left behind by the British authorities, the Commission-General outlined the course to be followed. Newly appointed Residents were given instructions to report back on the situation they encountered in their areas of jurisdiction. The transfer of power from the British to the Dutch went off peacefully, except in Krawang and western Cirebon where a revolt raged again in 1816 (Van Deventer 1891: CLXVI). The cause of the unrest was the nature and scale of the compulsory services and forced supply of commodities. The first demand of the rebels was for the workload to be lightened. An intercepted letter showed that local chiefs had called on their people to join the fight: 'Have all food prepared and have all people who wish to have a different lord or ruler ready to march to Cirebon.' Muntinghe, whose estate lay in this area, tried in vain to ward off the use of violence by telling Van Motman, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies, that the 'rebels' were nothing more than 'innocent creatures'. But the crowd, which had swelled to 2,500, refused to disperse. The armed response was carried out not only by colonial troops under the Resident's command, but also soldiers on foot and horseback led by the regents of Sumedang and Limbangan. Sixty of the insurgents were killed, 100 wounded and 500 taken prisoner (*ibid.*: 138-42). After the revolt had been quashed, a commission was

set up to investigate its causes. Its report referred to excessive oppression and exploitation by private landlords, who had pursued their regime of coercion with the support of local chiefs. It made an urgent plea for the lot of the common people to be improved. Although the unrest had been restricted to the coastal plain, there were fears that it would spread to the Priangan highlands, where the people endured a much heavier burden. The rebels were led by a notorious and feared gang-leader. This was not the first time that public order had been disturbed in this region. It was perhaps this reputation that had inspired the decision not to reintroduce forced cultivation in this area bordering on the Priangan. When Resident Servatius instructed the regent in the hinterland to encourage his people to grow coffee, he was informed that the Javanese had developed an almost insurmountable aversion to growing this crop and to the coercion that accompanied it.

In his report on the Priangan Regencies and Krawang in 1816, Resident Van Motman was content to give a rough estimate of the quantity of coffee produced, 42,000 *pikul* at the most, as there had been no regular inspections in the previous years. There were very few coffee inspectors and even fewer with more than a year or two of experience. Nevertheless, Van Motman predicted a rapid recovery in production, claiming that it should be possible to increase it to 100,000 *pikul* in the short term. The European staff who had to supervise production comprised, in addition to the Resident and four assistants, one inspector for each of the five regencies (Cianjur, Bandung, Sumedang, Limbangan and Sukapura). At that time, the Resident was still living in Wanayasa, on the border between Krawang and Cianjur, where Macquoid, as Superintendent of the Coffee Culture in the British period, had moved into a simple *pasagrahan* while waiting for a wooden house to be built. Van Motman suggested relocating his office to Cianjur. When this occurred, shortly afterwards, it was a clear sign that coffee cultivation had moved from the foothills to the highlands.

The survey initiated by the Commission-General also included investigating the state of coffee production. This important task was entrusted to the Inspector-General of Land-Rent and his deputy. Lawick and Van de Graaff reported on their findings at the end of 1818.[14] Quite logically the prospects for the Priangan Regencies were given most attention. This old production centre would have to continue to supply the greatest share of the export crop. It was therefore necessary to maintain the instruction that

14 Memorandum by Lawick and H.J. van de Graaff, 5 December 1818. NA, Schneither collection, 26.

each household should plant and tend to 1,000 fruit-bearing trees a year. The reporters established, however, that the number of households was much larger than the number of coffee planters. This was because the tribute was imposed, according to local custom, on the basis of the composite peasant household.

> ... the coffee planters understand a *tjiattya koppie* as a whole extended family of blood relations; for example, a father, his sons and sons-in-law will all count as belonging to the same *tjiattya koffij,* while in effect there are often three or four households, all living independently. (Lawick and Van de Graaff 1818)

In addition, by no means all coffee planters had to tend 1,000 trees, as coffee production had not penetrated everywhere, and especially to the more remote districts. A new road was urgently needed to expand production to the still inaccessible region of Sukapura. The observation that the coffee inspectors had been negligent in ensuring an even distribution of production was accompanied by a recommendation to the Resident to instigate a further investigation into the size of a *cacah kopi* and to determine whether the work involved in producing the coffee was distributed proportionally. The inspectors were criticized for relying too much on information from the regents rather than touring around to inspect the planting and tending of the trees themselves. There were also concerns whether the peasants were receiving correct payment for the compulsory delivery of their harvest. The two warehouses where this took place – Karang Sembung and Cikoa, situated where the highlands gave way to the coastal plain and the rivers became navigable – did not possess reliable weights and scales required to determine the volume of the loads. Bad roads and the long distances that the planters had to travel to deliver the coffee – the return journey, with pack animals or carts could often take a month or even longer – led to a proposal to open small warehouses spread over the districts to make the delivery of the beans less burdensome. Another suggestion was to ensure that there were sufficient pack animals and carts available for the transport.

In their report Lawick and Van de Graaff lastly drew attention to the problem caused by the alienation of land in the Priangan to private owners. Daendels had limited himself to selling land around Bogor, but under Raffles a much larger area had been sold off. The owners of these huge tracts often imposed different, and even heavier, burdens on the peasants than their countrymen endured under the government. The reporters'

main concern, however, was not the injustice suffered by the peasants. Their much more serious objection was that the existence of two parallel systems of taxation was a source of confusion and conflicted with colonial interests. They recommended a ruling on this grave and urgent matter from the metropolitan headquarters, a suggestion that must have come straight from the top of the colonial machinery.

Patching up leakage and other irregularities

The authorities tried to restrict the widespread smuggling of coffee by building watch-houses on the main through routes and manning them with guards to check passing traffic for contraband. In addition mounted police (*jayangsekar*) accompanied by constables (*pancalang*) patrolled the whole area. To ensure that they themselves did not engage in corrupt practices, they were relocated to another district every month. And that was not all; the Resident also used 'disguised inspectors' who moved amongst the population dressed in Sundanese clothing. Posing as traders, they would go to Krawang, Bogor, Cirebon, Tjampea and even Batavia to track down buyers of smuggled coffee. According to Jean Chrétien Baud, the ban on the sale and use of opium in the Priangan Regencies announced in 1824 was introduced out of fear that inhabitants of the region would sell coffee illegally to pay for their addiction (Baud 1852: 161). Another interpretation suggests that the fact that the Chinese acted as opium sellers was reason enough to ban them from the residency. This implies that the Chinese had persuaded the local chiefs and their people to use the drug. Colonial archivist De Haan emphatically rejected this explanation stating in plain language that, at the end of the eighteenth century, VOC officials used opium to pay for the coffee delivered to them.

> It was not the Chinese who were to blame for these practices, but in the first instance the Commissioner of Indigenous Affairs who, of all the various articles that he supplied to the highlands, had found none more profitable than opium, and who, through his privileged position, could easily quash all competition. (De Haan I, 1910: 248)

The permission granted to the Priangan regents to sell the drug was rescinded because of fears that the local chiefs' desire for income from this source might become too strong, at the expense of their primary task: to supervise the cultivation of coffee.

After a tour of the Sundanese highlands, Resident Van der Capellen expressed his dismay at the bad condition of the coffee gardens. The colonial authorities had already realized that their efforts to increase production had not resulted in the expected breakthrough. This called for more detailed investigation, a task entrusted to Inspector of Finances Van Haak. In the autumn of 1822 he reported his findings to the Chief Inspector. He began by observing that, after 1800, the coffee trees had not been planted on fertile ground. This had only recently improved. He also noted that, since 1808, the chiefs had failed to perform their supervisory duties satisfactorily. He confirmed that planting gardens on higher ground had produced much better results. Figures provided by the Resident's office showed a total of 29,290,733 trees, of which 12,093,248 had been planted between 1817 and 1820. Deducting 3,124,941 trees that were no longer fruit-bearing, this meant that the harvest was the product of 14,072,544 trees. Since the number of coffee planters in the official records was 18,645, there should have been 18,645,000 fruit-bearing trees. That left a production shortfall of more than five million, caused by many years of neglect or even destruction during the British era. In short, there was still a large pool of underutilized labour that could be deployed to increase production further. The peasants had to travel between 40 and 70 poles[15] to deliver the beans, a journey of 8 to 14 days for porters and pack animals, or 10 to 18 days for buffalo carts. The opening of warehouses in a few district headquarters in 1819 meant that smaller planters, who had no animals, could deliver their beans closer to home. They were paid less per *pikul* because freight drivers had to be subcontracted to carry the coffee in carts from these collection centres to the coast. The exhausting journey, the bad state of the roads and shortage of cattle feed meant that many of the animals died en route. Because of this risk and the low price the peasants received, as well as the fact that they were underpaid for the weight they did deliver, there was a great temptation to smuggle. The ban on Chinese from moving around in the Priangan Regencies was extended to Moors, Bengalis and Arabs, while Europeans were also forbidden to trade in the region. Sealing off the Priangan, rather than paying the peasants more for the coffee they delivered, remained the preferred solution.

In Van Haak's opinion, this was indeed the right choice. He then noted that coffee was produced with neither the Resident nor the inspectors being familiar with how it was grown. Consequently they lacked the knowledge to supervise the process. The sense of duty of the European staff left much

15 1 Java pole is approximately 1,500 metres.

to be desired, certainly given the high incomes they enjoyed due to the generous commission in cash they received for the coffee planted and delivered under their supervision. Besides their lack of experience with what they were supposed to do, their exceptionally meagre knowledge of the country and its people was an obstacle to them performing their tasks with any degree of competence. They also had insufficient time to become acquainted with the area under their jurisdiction. Their command of the language was pitiful, despite this being a condition for being appointed to the job. Their failure to give the regents the respect they deserved and to give them the money due to them was also a cause for concern. All in all, this meant that the European officials did not take measures in the interests of the local population, such as promoting agriculture, and because of sheer negligence jeopardized the goal of increasing coffee cultivation. The sale of estates to private landowners had disadvantaged the regents, who could no longer derive income from the land and peasants alienated from their jurisdiction. Lastly, Van Haak expressed his concern about the neglect of paddy cultivation, which made it difficult to meet the food requirements of the population. The main thread of his argument was to warn the European management in charge of coffee production not to push up the level of forced cultivation too high and to take an example from the indigenous chiefs, who also moderated their demands on their subordinates. Conversely, however, expansion of the paddy fields should not occur at the expense of the land planted with coffee trees. The Inspector of Finances made it clear that the government could not permit such a reduction in the production of this major commercial crop. Van Haak added a large number of appendices to his report containing data on the size of the population (almost 200,000, of which only 44 were European), the number of coffee planters, the state of the trees and the yield of the crop from 1817 to 1820, which he had obtained from the Resident's office. The distribution of the data among the different regencies offered insight into the relative importance of each. The epicentre was still in Cianjur, but the figures gave an early warning of the shift to Bandung that would gather pace in the following years, in terms of both population numbers and coffee cultivation. The statistics also included the production of coffee and paddy on the private estate of Sukabumi. The revenues from the harvest of both crops showed the enormous scale of this territorial intrusion into the Priangan Regencies.

The restoration of ties with the markets in the Atlantic world after the end of the Napoleonic wars gave a strong boost to the production of export crops in the colony. The Commission-General had found coffee production,

especially in the new production areas that had emerged since the beginning of the nineteenth century, in a bad state. The stagnating sales in the first years of British interim rule had led to widespread neglect of the trees. Restoring the area under cultivation to its former size took a considerable time. Although there was no change in the existing regime for the Priangan Regencies, it was the intention to encourage coffee production elsewhere on Java on the basis of free labour. The impression was created that the choice for unforced cultivation and sale had the approval of King Willem I (Van der Kemp 1916: 136). And yet, it did not reap the success that had been expected. Daendels had already driven coffee cultivation to unprecedented heights ten years previously, especially on the plain of Cirebon and on Java's east coast. But, once they were ripe for picking, the many millions of trees that he had ordered to be planted there produced an extremely meagre harvest. This figure was so low compared to the Priangan region, where a coffee tree would produce seven times as many beans, that in his report to Raffles in 1812 Rothenbühler proposed terminating growth of the crop completely in the region of Surabaya (Rothenbühler 1881: 55). In hope of better results, the Commission-General decided in 1817 to switch to free cultivation in areas where coffee was hardly grown, if at all. But the aversion to growing the crop was so strong, based on earlier experiences, that even the higher prices that private (Chinese and Arab) buyers were prepared to pay could not persuade the peasants to plant coffee on a genuinely large scale in the new production areas. The disappointing results led the government to fall back on the tried and trusted method of using coercion. An instruction that came into force in 1823 ordered coffee-planting villages to continue to do so in the future, but henceforth in the form of a levy in kind. The measures signified the cancellation of the free agreements of previous years. The new course had the desired effect but the pretension of free cultivation proved impossible to maintain, as Leonard du Bus de Gisignies reported a few years later (Van der Kemp 1916: 164). Willem van Hogendorp, who was the actual author of the report, was told by an informant in Central Java in 1828 about the way in which the peasants were put to work: 'They are driven to the gardens with a stick, just as everywhere else'. The difference from the situation in the Priangan Regencies was therefore not as great as intended. The traditionally much tighter control on compliance with the system of compulsory supply in this region probably explains why, as in the past, the cultivation of coffee continued to be linked primarily to these districts. A prognosis in 1818 forecast that three-quarters of the total production would come from the Priangan Regencies (*ibid.*: 192).

Increasing leverage for private estates

In its efforts to increase colonial production, to a large extent driven by the need for ever more funds to finance the development of economy and infrastructure in the metropolis, the Commission-General investigated the advantages and disadvantages of the various options. One was to promote free European colonization and agribusiness. A regulation drawn up in 1818 which effectively heralded the end of the Commission's activities – Van der Capellen remained behind alone as Commissioner-General – ordered that land be issued to European landowners to establish large-scale agricultural enterprises. As soon as it had taken office, the Commission-General had received applications from interested landowners from many quarters with plans to grow crops for export. The tour of Java undertaken by the three members of the Commission in 1817 to acquaint themselves with the situation at local level unleashed a new wave of applications. Under Raffles, a lobby of merchants had emerged, consisting of Europeans and other aliens (including Armenians), who also speculated in land. Many private entrepreneurs came from this mercantile background and, in the 1820s, they endeavoured to meet the growing demand for colonial commodities, not only coffee but also cotton, sugar and indigo. In various parts of Java they concluded rental or lease contracts with members of the landed gentry (Stevens 1982: 137-40). These new forms of commercial agriculture were concentrated mainly on the northern coastal plain and the principalities of Central Java. Although this trend was essentially in line with the course set out in the 1818 regulation, Van der Capellen and his colleagues were hesitant about continuing down the same road. There were a number of reasons for this. First of all, there was the uprising that had broken out in 1816 in Krawang and Cirebon, traditional hotspots of unrest. A committee of inquiry reported that the disturbances, stirred up by hangers-on of the exiled sultan, had spread rapidly. There were justifiable fears that it would spill over into the Priangan Regencies. As usual, the people's anger had been directed at Chinese racketeers. But there was no denying that European landlords had also been guilty of 'irregular and random appropriations and harassment'.[16] It is interesting to note that Muntinghe, who owned an estate in Indramaju, was among those accused of treating the people living on his land as mere serfs, '*taillables et corvéables à merci*', always at his beck and call (Van der Kemp 1916: 303-9). It was partly these excesses

16 For a description of the repressive labour regime on the private estates during this period, see Stevens 1982: 123-65.

that caused Van der Capellen to be less than accommodating to applicants for new concessions. Ironically it was Muntinghe himself who advised him to impose strict conditions on issuing land concessions.

> Excluded shall be not only *kampongs* and *dessas*, but also all lands known to the village council and lying within the bounds of the village, or used as grazing land for cattle. No Javanese shall be put to work on these lands, except that they themselves choose to do, and for payment of a full day's wage. (Van Deventer I, 1865: 345)

In addition to this fear of excessive exploitation of the indigenous population by the European-led agribusinesses, there was another argument against the alienation of land to private interests. Many of these landlords were not of Dutch origin and the policy-makers were concerned that their growing prominence might upset the political stability of the colony (Ottow 1937: 67). Van der Capellen's reluctance to issue new concessions angered many old hands. Conversely, however, he was initially hesitant to buy back land that had been privatized in the past, despite calls to this effect from many supporters of state control.

The property that De Wilde had accumulated through successive purchases[17] – first together with Raffles as the major partner and then with Nicolaus Engelhard, by taking over the share of the British Governor at a bargain price – covered a thinly populated and largely still uncultivated area of Sukabumi, the size of a small Dutch province, in the western part of the Priangan highlands. The new owner started his large-scale agribusiness in 1814 by encouraging the cultivation of paddy. He took considerable care to ensure that the peasants could grow sufficient food to live on by constructing a network of irrigation canals. Furthermore, it was not only local people who were permitted to cultivate the land. Newcomers were also encouraged to settle in and around Sukabumi. At that time, labour was scarcer than farmland and De Wilde realized that he needed to attract more people to his lands if he were to increase production. When he purchased the land, there were some 16,000 people living on it. Their number was to rise to far above 20,000 in the years that followed. This explains how, in 1814, the Regent of Cianjur lost not only a third of his land but also a substantial proportion of his subjects. The latter probably contributed to the decline in

17 For a description of the life and long career of this largest private landowner known on Java, see De Haan I, Personalia, 1910: 284-309. De Wilde's own publications also add much information to De Haan's account.

his income much more than the former. Land-poor peasants in particular would have surrendered to the temptation to desert their patron in the hope of a better future under the tutelage of a large landlord. In his later years, De Wilde described why and how he had taken the measurement of the land in the five districts that comprised his estate. For those who had remained landless, spatial mobility was an opportunity to rise a little up the agrarian ladder.

Food security for his tenants was not the only reason that De Wilde gave priority to the cultivation of paddy. The right to a fifth part of the harvest had been transferred from the regent to the new landlord, so that the owner of Sukabumi also had an interest in increasing paddy production. As a result of these efforts, the yield of the main food crop almost doubled in the first six years of operation (De Haan I, Personalia, 1910: 292). Because the estate was not too far from Batavia, De Wilde was able – despite the lack of proper roads and other difficulties with transport – to sell his share of the harvest for a good price on the market. The building of rice-husking mills was clear evidence that this food crop had become an attractive commercial commodity. Ensuring that the increase in growing paddy did not occur at the expense of coffee production was a major point of concern for the colonial authorities. Under the British, many coffee gardens had been converted into paddy fields, a move that was commented upon as regrettable when Dutch rule was restored, as it would mean less profit for the government. Absolute priority could not be given to the forced cultivation of what remained the main export crop, as this would create the risk of food shortages. In that respect, De Wilde appears to have made the right choice by steering a middle course between the two. He made it possible for the peasants to grow paddy in irrigated fields, but also forced them to plant coffee on dry ground. The result was a rise in production for both crops, though the increase was more even for paddy than for coffee. Years of rapid growth in the volume of coffee harvested, such as 1817-18, were followed by a temporary fallback to a much lower level.

The problem was less one of unstable production than of getting the coffee onto the market. The sale of the land and its exploitation as a large-scale enterprise run by European owners or managers not only required the preservation of forced cultivation but also the compulsory supply of coffee to the government at the same low price as was maintained throughout the Priangan Regencies. As Sukabumi fell outside the control of the regulated regime, suspicions arose that private landlords like De Wilde were guilty of illegal practices. Rather than supplying the coffee to the two designated warehouses at the officially fixed low price, they could make a much higher

profit by selling it outside the zone covered by the government monopoly. Once it arrived at places along the coast, in the vicinity of Batavia, in Cirebon or Banten, the coffee was immediately worth much more than when delivered in the Priangan Regencies. Smuggling – which is what the clandestine transport of the goods from the closed to the free market boiled down to – took place through a black market circuit in which consignments of goods repeatedly changed hands. By the end of its journey, the price of the coffee had risen to a multiple of what had been paid for it at the start (Van der Kemp 1916: 210). The increase in value during transport was typical of a monopoly system with purchase prices at the source of production therefore set at a minimum level from higher up. It is striking that these suspicions of illicit trade focused especially on the private landowners. There was no lack of evidence that the regents and lower chiefs were equally as guilty of evading the compulsory supply of coffee. They were undoubtedly more skilled in evading government control of their covert deals than the large landowners, who remained strangers in their own domains.

It would have been easy to put a stop to the smuggling of coffee by raising the price to the level paid for it on the free market. This simple solution was, however, rejected again and again. The first argument, nothing more than a pretext, was that there was no pressure at all to do this from the supply side. The regents did not openly voice their complaints, and the peasants even less. Remunerating the indigenous managers more handsomely would enrich them to an extent that would upset the existing balance of power. Rewarding the peasants more would be inadvisable because what they were paid had been shown to be sufficient to meet their simple needs. But De Wilde and Engelhard, the joint owners of Sukabumi, protested – not against the forced cultivation of coffee but against its compulsory supply to the government at what they considered too low a price. The answer from the colonial policy-makers was that no other interest should have priority above making the maximum profit. The Commissioners-General, to whom both landlords directed their complaints, refused to allow them to sell the coffee on the free market or even to legalize the sale of land in the Priangan to private landowners. Lawick, the newly appointed Inspector of the Land-Rent Department, proved to be responsible for this unsympathetic response. Commissioner-General Van der Capellen showed De Wilde and Engelhard the coffee report from 1818 in which Lawick and his deputy had expressed their disapproval of the continued existence of private domains in the Priangan Regencies. Their response was of course highly critical. For a start, they decried the lack of feeling with which Lawick, who was familiar with the miserable plight of the highland peasantry, had resisted

any increase in the price paid to the simple coffee planters. They were also very scathing about the force used to extort the peasants' labour. The far too heavy burden imposed upon them left them insufficient time to grow food. Pitiful was how they described the lot of the people of the Priangan Regencies. It was not a response that brought the parties closer together. The owners of Sukabumi followed a course that challenged the monopoly system in the Priangan Regencies and led them to clash with the top of the colonial apparatus.

The downfall of the free enterprise lobby

It should come as no surprise that the Priangan gentry did not exactly appreciate the presence of these foreign intruders in their backyard. The latter conducted themselves in a completely different way, as energetic businessmen driven by their own enlightened self-interest to make their enterprises a success (De Wilde 1830: 199). Although they lived in comfort and luxury on their estates, their treatment of the peasants was at variance with that of the Sundanese nobles. De Wilde himself drew attention to this difference in 1815, when he had the opportunity to attend an audience of the regent of Cianjur. He summarized his impressions of courtly ostentation as follows.

> The [regent] is seen as an elevated personage, and enjoys the slavish respect of all the people. No one, not even the highest of chiefs, may approach him standing up, but must do so crawling on the ground. If the chiefs of the outer districts of this Regency are summoned or come of their own accord, they are admitted to the Regent on their hands and knees, and are permitted to touch his knee with their hands folded together. But lower chiefs and common folk fall to the ground, bow their heads on their folded hands, after which they may, very quickly, touch his foot. (De Wilde 1830: 173)

When Commissioner-General Van der Capellen, together with his brother Robert – who he had appointed Resident in the Priangan Regencies – decided that owners of private estates were not permitted to make use of corvee services which the peasants were obliged to render, this was an immediate and direct threat to the continued existence of the large agribusinesses. That a similar ban had been in force since the time of Daendels and Raffles, without civil servants of all ranks taking any notice of this

restriction in their call on free labour, was of course not up for discussion. There is no doubt that much of De Wilde's considerable success with his businesses was due to the large-scale mobilization of unpaid or underpaid peasant labour to construct irrigation works, cultivate the land, lay roads and build his luxurious mansions – including not only Sukabumi but also Udyungbrung, which was close to Bandung – and of course by requisitioning a considerable share of the paddy harvest. Private estates had to be returned to government hands and that could only be achieved by taking steps that would eventually lead to the landowners having to give up the concessions they had bought. De Wilde in particular was not afraid to resist these efforts forcefully. At the end of 1819, when he no longer found a sympathetic ear among the leading officials in the colonial headquarters, he returned to the Netherlands to plead his case at the highest level, starting with the Minister for the Colonies. With the help of friends, his petition reached the King and, in June 1821, he was granted an audience at which he had the opportunity to reveal his ambitious plans to Willem I. It would take little effort, he told the King, to increase coffee production to a much higher level, but first a higher price would have to be paid for it. If not, then the large estate owners would have no other choice than to switch to other crops. A month later, without consulting Van der Capellen, the King gave De Wilde permission to sell coffee at the free market rate rather than supply it to the government. The ruling in which this agreement was laid down, which the Commissioner-General in Batavia was informed of a little later by the Minister, also stipulated that the private landowners would receive reimbursement equal to the average market price for their loss of income in the previous period and for the coming two years. This expression of the monarch's goodwill was not well received by the policy-makers in the colony, not least so because De Wilde justified his decision to bypass the colonial bureaucracy by claiming that he was in a hurry and that the high command in Batavia would probably 'not feel authorized to decide on his petition' (De Haan I, 1910: 299). Despite the fact that the King's ruling was clearly not open to different interpretations, this is exactly what happened. When De Wilde, thinking he had won his case, returned to Sukabami a year later he was accompanied by an entourage that included not only a music tutor for piano and organ – for the diversion of his recently acquired young wife – but also an agricultural expert, a veterinary doctor and a horticulturalist together with his family. On arrival he was, however, given to understand that the royal order was still under deliberation. It soon became clear this delay would be permanent. With the affair thus brought to an end, there was no longer any need to raise the price of coffee supplied

by the private landowners closer to that of the market. Elout had set out in an advisory memorandum why granting De Wilde's petition would have been unwise. His arguments included the claim that privileging the owner of Sukabumi would have an unfavourable effect on the peasants in the adjoining Priangan region, raising their hopes of getting a higher price for their coffee. Elout expressed the fear that this would also have a negative impact on production.

> It is a fact ... that the Javanese in the Priangan Regencies have very few needs, that they are now accustomed to the price they are paid, that any increase in the price would lead many, even the majority, not to increase their production but have the opposite effect on some who, seeing that they could earn enough money to satisfy their simple needs by selling less coffee, would settle for that lower level of production and not make the effort to earn more. (Ottow 1937: 94)

The belief that indigenous producers behaved non-economically had become fixed in the colonial mindset. As will be discussed in the Epilogue, it was the dogma that later grew into the inverse elasticity of supply and demand, as Boeke would include it in his theory of dualistic economy.

The already rather unfavourable policy climate for large-scale European agricultural colonization worsened under Commissioner-General Godert van der Capellen. Around 1820, the course of economic politics had undergone a radical change of which the European entrepreneurs in the principalities of Central Java and elsewhere on the island would also be the victims. The owners of private estates were now seen in official jargon as 'parasitic plants'. Besides scepticism about their economic proficiency, political reservations now added grist to the mill of those who opposed alienated land ownership. Aware that they were fighting a losing battle – staying on any longer was no longer advisable as the government, in collusion with the regent of Cianjur, was turning the people of Sukabumi against the expatriate owners of the privatized enclave in the highlands – De Wilde and Engelhard made it clear after a few months that they would be willing to settle for compensation. The government set up a commission to negotiate the price. To fight their case, the owners of the huge property called in a man who seemed to enjoy eternal life on the colonial stage: Muntinghe. With him as their intermediary, the parties reached agreement early in 1823 on a purchase price of 800,000 guilders. De Wilde left the colony shortly afterwards, this time for good. His disappearance signified the restoration of the Priangan Regencies as a sealed off reserve set aside for the

compulsory cultivation and delivery of coffee. And as a region where, under the overall supervision of a handful of European officials, the indigenous gentry remained in control. They were in charge here, and the peasants paid tribute to them only, and not to outsiders, especially private landowners. The erosion of what passed for the traditional order had come to an end.

What De Wilde considered his life's work had come to a premature and ungracious end. In a memoir written many years later the agro-industrial man of business described with due pride the pioneering role he had played and in which he had been thwarted by conservative forces that had gained the upper hand. In his perception, the landed gentry were completely superfluous as middlemen between the peasantry and the government. Extortion and repression were the inevitable consequences of this form of indigenous authority. He recommended dismissing the local chiefs, with the right to an annual purse, and replacing them with a corps of competent Dutch officials familiar with the country, its language and its people. When Dutch rule was restored, rather than adopting De Wilde's proposed path to the new era, the government chose to repair a system which was already known to be inadequate to achieve the acceleration of the economy that it had in mind. The alternative model of colonial exploitation that De Wilde advocated – replacing the regents as the supervisors of the coffee production by European landowners as private entrepreneurs, had come half a century too early.

The policy dispute continues

Godert van der Capellen had emerged the victor and he made no efforts to disguise his satisfaction. Under Resident Gerrit van Motman, the coffee production in the Priangan remained at a disappointingly low level between 1817 and 1820. The latter's successor, Robert van der Capellen, managed to improve these results, much to the satisfaction of his brother, the Commissioner-General. Whether the Sundanese peasants had equal reason to be content is extremely doubtful. Coffee cultivation continued and increased, but remained as unfree as before. In 1822, the Commissioner-General produced a long 'colonization report' in response to those who criticized this course explaining what in his changed view would be the best basic policy from the perspective of maximum profitability for the metropolis – that was, as always, the main priority – and for the development of the country and people of the East Indies. Although the report bore Van der Capellen's name, there is little reason to doubt the verdict voiced by Ottow

that it had been written by Muntinghe. The Commissioner-General had learned from his experience in previous years that the political economy of Java should not rely on European colonists practising small- or large-scale agriculture. Of course, there was something to be said for using the colony to relieve the metropolis of the pressure of possible over-population and of a social class that had not fared well back home, offering the prospects of economic recovery in a new environment. However, as had occurred in other colonies, the expatriate population of overseas possessions would at some point wish to gain independence from the mother country. A relation of brotherhood would then develop with the newly independent state. After all, it would be populated by Asiatic Dutch descendants of the same tribe. The report did not describe the consequences of this scenario for the indigenous peasantry, considering the advantages and disadvantages only from a European perspective.

The small-scale farmer option was rejected straightaway. The arrival of large numbers of white peasant colonists from Europe to till the land was not a realistic proposition. Experiments along these lines by the VOC in the eighteenth century had been a miserable failure. This was not only because the labour capacity of the Europeans was not suited to a tropical climate. The strenuous effort that the settlers would have to make was far beneath the dignity of the native gentry, while manual labour in any form could be performed by simple indigenous peasants at a much lower price. Both general social and more specific economic considerations therefore made it necessary to reject this alternative. No doubt, the situation was completely different for big agribusiness, as it already existed on a limited scale and there were increasingly vocal calls to expand it. But, the report explained, it had by no means proved its value in practice. The reporter warned that European knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit, inasmuch as there was a need for it in the cultivation of tropical crops, should be applied with the utmost caution. As far as the cultivation of food was concerned, only poverty stood in the way of Javanese peasants increasing their production of paddy and other daily necessities. There was nothing to be gained at all from allowing European entrepreneurs access to the growing agro-industry. It was therefore not surprising that Van der Capellen, with Muntinghe as his ghost-writer, was accused of obstructing this alternative, i.e. private estates in the hands of non-natives as much as possible, with the ultimate intention of expelling them from Java entirely. Although this part of the report focused on how agrarian production should be increased, it also stated in the clearest terms that, while the government – by virtue of its dominion over the colony – had acquired ownership of all cultivated and uncultivated

lands, its power over both populated and less populated areas was restricted by indigenous norms and customs. The government was therefore not free to alienate the land and the labour power of the peasants that lived on it into private hands (Ottow 1937: 267). The report made a passionate plea for the state to develop the potential surplus value of the colony. It argued that, if all land were surrendered to European colonists, it was bound to generate less profit for the state in 25 years than it would in a single year of indigenous rule under the direct supervision of the government. It is not difficult to see in this statement the principles that would later constitute the essence of the cultivation system that would be introduced less than ten years later. Van der Capellen was known as a supporter of liberal views. But the question was what that entailed, besides his rejection of the regime of coercion and monopoly from the VOC era. The colonization report noted that what may have been considered liberal 3,000 miles away would have an extremely illiberal effect here in the colony. So what was seen as liberal: opening the colony to foreign capital rather than relying on internal accumulation, promoting private initiatives rather than the interests of the state in an entrepreneurial role, preferring agribusinesses to small-scale popular farming, replacing unfree with free labour, or combining these options in one way or another? The answers given in the report are by no means always clear. What Van der Capellen rejected in any case was colonization in the form of settler migration from the metropolis or – and this was much closer to colonial reality in the first half of the nineteenth century – surrendering Javanese land and the peasants that lived on it to large-scale European agro-industry. Van der Capellen strongly resisted the intrusion of capitalist enterprise presented as a liberal solution by its protagonists (Rengers van Welderen 1947: 153). It was the denial of the latter policy that aroused the displeasure of an important business lobby in the colony that had the sympathy of King Willem I and his closest advisers. The Commissioner-General had not restricted himself to a theoretical rejection of private land ownership, but had put his ideas into practice by nullifying, in 1823, all land rental contracts that European and their Chinese partners had concluded with the indigenous aristocracy in the principalities of Central Java. Van der Capellen's opponents blamed this decision for the widespread revolt that broke out shortly afterwards and which took five years to bring under control. According to an alternative interpretation, this revolt – known as the Java War (1825-30) – was caused by the exploitation and repression of the local peasants whose chiefs had contracted them out, together with the land, to the new class of foreign entrepreneurs to cultivate commercial crops. Willem van Hogendorp, who travelled through Central

Java in 1827, believed that the people's hatred of coffee cultivation was an important reason for the broad support enjoyed by the leader of the revolt, Dipanegara, in the early years of the war (Carey 2007: 466). At the time, however, the first interpretation was more popular, and one which – after being informed of the situation by the Resident of Yogyakarta, who acted as the representative of the planters' lobby – the King and his close confidants adhered to. It was time for a change of course, not only to generate more profits for the metropolis, but also to cover the costs of a colonial apparatus that now found itself in a state of war. The financial situation in the colony was no less dire than it was in the Netherlands. It did not help that the coffee price, after an initial rise, had been falling severely and consistently since 1822-23, and this continued for the first few years after the introduction of the cultivation system. Based on cheap land rates and slave labour, Brazil's exports rapidly increased after the country had gained independence in 1822. By 1850, Brazil was producing over half the world's beans. Amsterdam remained the main entrepôt in the global coffee market but the shift in production resulted in a discrepancy between supply and demand which hit the volume imported from Java esspecially hard (Stevens 1982: 95-122; Clarence-Smith and Topik: 2003: 31).

By 1826, Van der Capellen had served his turn and was replaced by Viscount Leonard du Bus de Gisignies. The new Commissioner-General was sent to the East Indies with orders to do what his predecessor had failed to do: to put the liberal principles into practice by promoting the widespread foundation of large-scale private agribusinesses. Van der Capellen had fiercely disputed both the economic benefits and the political desirability of this strategy for colonial development. Du Bus took with him Willem van Hogendorp, the son of Gijsbert Karel,[18] who illustrated his anti-statist views by pointing to the situation in the Priangan region, where the regents were extremely wealthy and the peasants lived in abject poverty. It could not be denied, he proclaimed, that the forced cultivation of coffee in the region had proved much more profitable than the pseudo-freedom that characterized agricultural production in the rest of Java. In his view, however, hanging on to this lucrative monopoly in the longer term also had a great disadvantage: the lack of purchasing power among the local population meant that there were no opportunities to develop a market here for products imported from the metropolis.

18 Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp had facilitated the return of the Orange Nassau dynasty and the installation of Willem I as King of the United Netherlands in 1815.

It was now Van Hogendorp's turn to write a colonization report (included in Steijn Parvé 1851), in which he, as an early-nineteenth-century advocate of the free market doctrine, argued in favour of the import of capital and business acumen from Europe for the cultivation of new land. The author's liberal views, however, did not extend to concern about the Sundanese peasants who had to continue to work in a state of unfreedom. The report said little or nothing about protecting the population from injustice and abuse. Van Hogendorp did not have a very high opinion of the willingness of the native peasantry to work hard and improve their economic situation. The new-style European entrepreneurs should set a good example. He believed that the feudal subordination of the people to their own chiefs should be transferred to the European colonists who could act as white regents and help preserve law and order (Steijn Parvé 1851: 257). The advocates of liberalization hardly had the opportunity, however, to try out their proposals on intransigent colonial reality. The first results were anything but encouraging. The path they showed to the future seemed for the time being to be a dead end due a lack of energy, cooperation and even interest from the social class which they had envisaged as launching private initiatives and being equipped with agro-industrial know-how. It is unlikely that their proposal to give the much larger group of European settlers that they saw as emerging greater authority over the indigenous population was received with open arms within the governmental apparatus. Reports of overt opposition to their plans from these quarters were rare, however. There were other, more direct reasons why this policy was doomed to failure, the most important being the lack of a sufficient supply of capital and qualified entrepreneurs. The returns of the existing large-scale agribusinesses on Java varied considerably. The risk of disappointing results hampered the investment of more agro-industrial capital on a large scale and there was also very limited expertise to manage it effectively. The time was not yet ripe for the up-and-coming planter-entrepreneur; this would not really come until well into the second half of the nineteenth century. There were also political objections to dividing Java up into private estates, with European colonists putting the local population to work, at a time that the colonial state had not yet sufficiently established itself. Van der Capellen had warned about the political consequences of this in his colonization report.

> The whole *form of rule in the Indies* is untenable with this unlimited *colonization* by Europeans, and would in the shortest time be completely set on its head. The separation of these colonies from the metropolis would be brought forward to an inopportune moment, and the richest

> jewel in the *crown of the Netherlands,* would be ripped off by unholy hands. (Ottow 1937: 292)

There was another argument in favour of declaring the colonial economy a matter of state business. For a century, the monopoly had been restricted to the sphere of production: the exclusive cultivation and supply of commercial crops, at first to the VOC and then to the government. The next step was to extend it to shipping the coffee and selling it on the global market. Although the East Indies had been returned to the Netherlands in 1817 after the British interlude, in economic terms the foreign influence had not been shaken off by far. Raffles had set himself the goal, with the creation of Singapore, of gaining control of Southeast Asian trade and inter-insular traffic in the archipelago remained in non-Dutch hands for several decades (Mansvelt 1938). Perhaps most striking of all, the majority of trading houses and shipping companies in the Indies were in foreign, mainly British, hands. In the VOC era, ships flying the Company flag carried the largest share of the colonial products to Europe for export, but the French occupation of Holland in 1795 made the VOC's home ports inaccessible as a result of the British blockade of the coast. This led to goods being sold directly from the warehouses in Batavia to foreign traders who were neutral in the continental wars. Around the turn of the century, they carried large quantities of coffee to Atlantic ports that had remained outside the conflict. The free shipping traffic that grew up in the archipelago ensured that coffee from the Priangan remained reasonably saleable, but the price that had to be paid for this solution was the loss of the trade monopoly. It was once again the indestructible Muntinghe, designated by Raffles in 1817 in a letter to Van Hogendorp as the linchpin of colonial policy-making, who persuaded Willem I of the danger of the dominant role of British trade and shipping in the archipelago. His conversations with the King while taking leave the Netherlands in 1823 led a year later to the establishment of the Dutch Trading Company (NHM). The recalcitrance that Muntinghe had displayed throughout his long career stood in the way of his appointment as a director. The initiative for which he had given the prime impulse was grounded in the desire to retain the profits of the colonial economy for the Netherlands and, as in the days of the VOC, to tolerate as little foreign competition as possible. It was a kill-or-cure remedy because it not only denied foreign competitors access to the Indies, but also Dutch entrepreneurs; they would not gain a position of some significance until the second half of the nineteenth century. Nor did the measure produce the desired effect immediately. Success only came with the introduction of the cultivation system, when

the revenues of the production ordered by the government were given to the NHM in consignation. The NHM became the commercial complement of the forced cultivation and delivery to the government of colonial goods. It was subsequently given sole rights to ship and sell the goods on arrival in Europe. This decision created one long monopoly chain that started with forced cultivation in the Sunda highlands and ended with the buyers at the coffee auctions in Amsterdam. The archipelago, which had always been an exploitation colony, became more than ever the overseas pool for Dutch economic interests. The close relationship that had been established between production and distribution called for uniform management – by the government.

Political turmoil at home

A separate study would be required to do justice to the restructuring of the relationship between the colony and the metropolis from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Such an endeavour is beyond my current study, which essentially remains limited to a treatise on the Priangan system in successive stages of colonial exploitation. The insolvency and subsequent collapse of the Dutch East Indies Company at the end of the eighteenth century coincided with radical shifts in the political constellation at home. This upheaval, again, had major repercussions on how to govern the colonial domain. In order to comprehend the new state regime that came about I shall outline in a brief summary what happened in the metropolis and the consequences of this change in the political setting for the promotion and outcome of the policies pursued in what was and would remain the Netherlands' major colonial domain.

The Republic of the United Netherlands, formed by seven provinces in the sixteenth century, had by the eighteenth century fallen into a state of stagnation and regression. The trade and industry that had generated so much profitable activity was in decline as the focus of the international economy shifted to new routes and commodities. As a consequence of increasing protectionism, the textile industry in particular saw its markets dissipate and the ensuing loss of employment caused severe economic distress in many towns that had grown prosperous around it. Dutch society retained its strong agrarian-cum-artisanal character. Where there was a gradual transition to machine-based production in other parts of Europe, the development of industrial capitalism in the Netherlands did not progress past the manufacturing stage. The country's extensive maritime industry

– fishing, shipbuilding, sail- and rope-making – fell into decay. A large proportion of the population – which had grown only to a little under two million at the end of the eighteenth century – led a miserable, often impoverished existence. A telling comment was made by a foreign visitor to this parochial landscape.

> In such circumstances this trading nation must be in a bad way. Most of their principal towns are sadly decayed, and instead of finding every mortal employed you meet with multitudes of poor creatures who are starving in idleness. Utrecht is remarkably ruined. There are whole lanes of wretches who have no other subsistence than potatoes, gin, and stuff which they call tea and coffee… (Pottle 1952: 287)

This picture that James Boswell painted of Utrecht in the early 1760s was typical of many urban locations. The situation was no less critical in the countryside, though it was less visible in the public eye. The prevailing misery was of course not equally desperate for everyone or across the board. The slave trade, for instance, remained a very profitable business as shipping black humans from Africa to America was a lucrative source of income for the merchants and conveyors of this valuable commodity. In some sectors and provinces, it is also possible that the decline largely took place in the first half of the eighteenth century followed by a slight recovery in later years. A lack of exact figures and more detailed information makes it difficult to draw up the balance of economic progress and regression. The outcome was in any case a widespread deterioration in standards of living and a growing divide between rich and poor.

The skewed distribution between society's top and bottom also became politically manifest. The divisions between the supporters of the Orangist party and the Patriots, who were more in favour of a republican system, were not new but, partly under pressure from the political turbulence in continental Europe, became more sharply defined. The rank and file on both sides were now embroiled in armed clashes. The political *coup d'état* by *stadtholder* Willem V, prince of the house of Orange-Nassau, in 1787 brought an end to the swelling tide of the republican cause (Schama 1977). Defeated in their contest for state power, many of the leading Patriots went into exile in France from where they propagated the ideals of the revolution that came soon afterwards. When French troops invaded the Netherlands, Willem left the country and in 1795 the Batavian Republic was declared, named after a Germanic tribe that had challenged the might of the Roman empire in the remote past. A revised constitution enacted in 1801 expanded

political representation and conceded civil rights withheld earlier. But the emancipatory ideals of the revolution remained inoperative outside the metropolis. A study of the impact of Patriotic politics on the handling of colonial affairs concluded that the principles of the Enlightenment were considered not to apply to people of other races. Pamphlets condemning slavery were distributed and discussed as a crime against humanity but the sentiments expressed by radical reformers were not widely shared and certainly not by the main policy-makers. Treating whites and non-whites equally would have endangered the profits made overseas.

> The explanation may be found partly in the inconsistencies present in that way of thinking, partly in the inability of the 'Patriots' to pursue a clearly defined policy of their own under unfavourable circumstances, and above all in their clinging to the possession of colonies for the benefit of Dutch prosperity (Schutte 1970: 223).

The new state formation remained firmly under French tutelage although the allegiance became less rigorous with the installation of Napoleon's brother as King of Holland in 1806. But this regime change was also a short interval, ending with the annexation of the provinces as departments into the French empire in 1810. Again, this was short-lived, as the breakdown of the Napoleonic project led to yet another restructuring of the territorial boundaries of the lowlands.

The radical uprisings throughout Europe had failed and what followed was an anti-democratic restoration of political power also embodied in the return of monarchical governance. At the Vienna Congress in 1815, the allied nations which had joined forces to resist the expansion of France in Europe agreed to the formation of the new Kingdom of the United (i.e. North and South) Netherlands. The monarch foisted on the amalgamated population of Belgium and the erstwhile Netherlands by international diplomacy was the son of the late *stadtholder* of Oranje-Nassau who proclaimed himself sovereign King Willem I. The geopolitical shift engineered by Great Britain and Prussia in tandem aimed to hold France, now cut down in size territorially, in containment by creating a buffer state on its northern borders. Being upgraded to a higher political stature in continental Europe came at a price for the Netherlands – the loss of most of the maritime colonies it had acquired in Africa and Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the time of the French occupation the British had taken over a number of important enclaves conquered and retained by the VOC. After Napoleon's downfall, Britain refused to hand back most of the appropriated

Dutch colonies, seeing its ambition to become a global power realized with the help of mostly coastal settlements it had acquired outside Europe. The only prize the Dutch regained in Asia was Java, not much larger than the territory of the new kingdom in the metropolis. Admittedly, that overseas possession would subsequently grow into a much larger domain, the Netherlands East Indies, but that did not occur until later in the nineteenth century and only because the British understood that the spread of Dutch imperialism in the archipelago was less of a risk than allowing the French or, possibly also the Germans, to penetrate into this resource-rich region in Southeast Asia. It was the protection as a client state which enabled the parochial metropolis – by grabbing what came to be called 'the Outer Islands' and incorporating them into the colonial state – to slowly build up the framework of the giant Indonesia as we know it today.

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands did not start with an upswing in the economy. The malaise of the preceding decades had lingered on and was further aggravated in the wake of the changes to the continental system introduced by Napoleon. When the British imposed a naval blockade on the coasts of France in 1806, he retaliated by proclaiming an embargo on all British commodities in the many parts on the continent under his control. Both Belgian and Dutch trade and industry bore the brunt of being cut off from import and export traffic overseas. The economy of Amsterdam, the main harbour, was badly affected by the maritime blockade. Shipyards which had employed some 2000 carpenters and other craftsmen in 1800, closed up shop. In 1765 less than 10 per cent of the urban population depended on poor relief but from 1807-09 not less than 40 per cent lived on charity. There was a strong rise in the number of beggars and, according to police reports, each and every day ten babies were left abandoned in the streets. From 240,000 in 1730 Amsterdam's population dwindled to little more than 180,000 in 1805 (Joor 2015: 266). The economic and social havoc caused by the ceaseless wars which Napoleon had waged throughout the continent continued in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Political turmoil contributed again to the protracted economic stagnation. Belgium ventured to split off in 1830 because Willem I, who proved to be an autocratic ruler, refused to meet demands for reform. A burden to the remaining state budget, the dispute lasted until 1839 and ended with partition of the united territory along the old demarcation lines between the northern and southern Netherlands. It was a humiliating blow to the King's grand design to be acknowledged as a top-ranking state-builder and power contender in the new Europe. A no less severe setback was the war fought against Dutch rule in Central Java from 1825 to 1830 at heavy military cost. Willem I took it upon himself to reduce

the deficit and the colony was of crucial importance in the sustained effort to boost the metropolitan economy with higher growth rates. Achieving this major objective, the production of a rapidly rising colonial surplus, became the state's core business.

A small coterie of counsellors unswervingly loyal to the King advised him on how to solve that prime question, rather than the national assembly, which had hardly any say in determining the framework and course of foreign policy. Willem tolerated no outside – let alone public – interference in his handling of colonial affairs and treated the tenaciously held possession in the East Indies as crown property. He chose from among his circle of Royal favourites who to send to Java with the mission to organize the 'surplus' and extract it for repatriation. The successful candidates were elevated to the rank of a *nouveau* nobility, an innovation which tended to be regarded with disdain by those holding titles of older and more feudal vintage. In the next chapter we shall return to the Priangan coffee lands to examine what these Royal emissaries did to comply with the instructions of their overlord. Willem I dictated his policies with brazenness and promulgated them in Royal decrees without bothering, even in a show of semblance, to involve parliament as a main stakeholder. His cunning temperament and obnoxious stubbornness not to compromise on the powers he had usurped was a major reason for his downfall. In 1840 he stepped back, having grudgingly been obliged to settle the dispute with Belgium, but more tellingly because of his absolutist intransigence to be held accountable for his financial misdemeanours in colonial affairs. What was called 'the Indies deficit' deferred to a style of bookkeeping which implied that the colony had to provide most of the cash required for running the metropolitan economy in a way that defeated monitoring by political guardians who were sitting in parliament and insisted on a clear divide between the Royal purse and the national treasury. His intractability in providing information on income and expenditure stood the King in good stead as a private man of fortune. When he crowned himself in 1815, Willem I's fortune was valued at 20 million guilders and the wealth he amassed once in kingly power was said in 1840 to have amounted to 200 million guilders. Colonial exploitation had been profitable, if not for the Dutch population at large than certainly for their ruler, who went down in history as the Merchant King.

V Unfree labour as a condition for progress

Shifting coffee cultivation to gardens

The initial practice of permitting peasants to plant coffee near to their homes had the advantage that they could combine the work of tending to the new crop with what had always been their priority: producing food for their own subsistence. Using the *balubur* – the regents' own fields – for the compulsory cultivation of coffee, with their subjects coming in turn to the main *negorij* from near and far, could also be interpreted as a continuation of existing relations of servitude. But the progressive rise in production towards the end of the eighteenth century led to this system being revised. The peasants indicated that there was no more land around their homes to grow more coffee or claimed that these fields were depleted through over-use (De Haan III, 1912: 610). More important than the lack of space in and around the peasant settlements was the fact that it was impossible for the Commissioner and his small staff of coffee sergeants to conduct regular inspections of the numerous and widely scattered plots of land. Both problems made it necessary to organize the cultivation of coffee along different lines, moving it to more remote, as yet uncultivated, land. The objection that the new coffee gardens were further from the settlements was outweighed by the advantage that there was ample space to expand into the forest around them, as they were far from any human habitation and land already in regular use to grow food.

The first hillside coffee gardens were laid out at the end of the eighteenth century and required the mobilization of an enormous army of labour. First of all, the land had to be cleared by chopping down and burning the trees. Levelling the ground was especially time-consuming as terraces had to be constructed on the slopes to stop the soil being washed away. After that the soil had to be tilled repeatedly with a *pacul*, a kind of hoe, and all the stubble and stones removed. The gardens were divided into sections by broad paths and the outer boundary was marked by a fence and a moat, which served to carry off excess water and to keep wild animals at bay. Tigers and rhinoceroses made the forests and the mountains unsafe until deep into the nineteenth century. The remote and inaccessible locations of the coffee gardens fuelled the fears of the labourers mobilized from far and wide to prepare the land for cultivation that they would be attacked by

predators on the way to and from their work. If there were reports of tigers being seen in the area, they would refuse to go (De Haan I, 1910: 155-6; see also III; 1912: 612-3). It is hardly surprising then that many peasants left their habitats on hearing that they were shortly to be set to work to construct hillside coffee gardens in distant places.

Coffee saplings were initially planted using shoots that had germinated from fallen berries under existing trees. It was not until later that they were first grown in nursery plots and then, after two years, transferred to the garden, where they would start to bear fruit after another two years. To prevent the trees from growing together, they had to be planted six to eight feet apart. This meant that it remained possible to walk between them. After every two rows in both directions, there was a row of *dadap* trees, which were planted before the coffee shrubs and grew high enough to keep them in the shade. This practice continued until the discovery that the coffee trees did not need shade in the higher zones, because the sun was weaker. From 1807 it was no longer permitted to plant paddy or *pisang* shrubs between the coffee trees. As this was a break with a long-standing tradition, it was not at first strictly enforced. Later, however, orders were issued to uproot paddy and *pisang* that had been planted between the young trees. Everything other than coffee was banished from the gardens. According to the colonial officials, this gave a neater impression. They showed no concern for the benefits the planters had enjoyed from growing other crops in the gardens while the coffee shrubs were still developing.

During the first three years the planters had to return once a month to the garden to remove the weeds that grew between the trees and to remove leaves and fallen branches from the paths. Officially, this maintenance work was intended to make it easier to pick the berries, but the inspectors also wanted to keep the gardens neat and tidy. It would later be discovered that loosening the soil regularly with a hoe made the fertile upper layer wash away more quickly, reducing the yield. To prevent the trees from growing too high for the berries on the top branches to be picked by hand, the trunks were topped off, while the lower branches were also removed to leave room on the ground for fallen berries. Topping off the trunks was considered a good way of restoring the growing power of old trees until it was discovered that this very labour-intensive operation did not have the desired effect. It became normal practice to abandon coffee gardens that had been in production longer than six to eight years and replace them with new ones, since there was no shortage of uncultivated land at a more elevated level in the Sunda highlands. Picking the berries was extremely labour-intensive and, because they were not all ripe at the same time, could

take two to three months. This meant that the planter and his family had to relocate to the garden for this whole period, because they lived too far away to cover the distance every day. They had to take enough food with them for the duration of their stay, or arrange for a regular supply to be brought up. When the coffee was still grown close to the villages, the beans were dried over a wooden fire in the yard around the peasant's homestead but, after it was moved to the gardens, this took place there, too. Instead of carrying the wet berries to the settlements after picking, the planters removed the flesh and husked the beans on the spot. The beans were then spread out in bamboo drying sheds, under which a small fire smouldered day and night. The army of harvesters would also sleep in these covered sheds at night and take shelter there during heavy rainfall. Speaking from his own experience, De Wilde noted details that were not to be found in any of the official reports, because his account also refers to the inspection practices.

> In such work-sites there are usually one or more blocks of wood with holes, in which the feet of lower Chiefs and common people are locked, for the slightest misdemeanour, for several hours, a whole day or longer, by way of punishment. These are deeds that the Javanese Chiefs commit in the highlands, with or without the knowledge of the Regents and Sergeants. ... In some districts, when the Resident, or some other high-ranking figure, comes to inspect the coffee gardens unexpectedly, the people are driven into the mountains at night to clean the gardens by torchlight. I know for a fact that, on one of these occasions, an old woman was dragged off by a tiger. (1830: 184)

The advantages of growing coffee in gardens were self-evident. It was much easier to monitor these large-scale cultivated estates than small plots widely dispersed throughout a much more diverse agrarian landscape. Separate sections in the gardens were allocated to labourers from different villages and numbered pickets stated how many trees had been planted and when. With the various sections subdivided by the footpaths, it was possible to organize the work even further by allocating plots to individual households mobilized for cultivation. The gardens were accessible only through an opening in the perimeter fence, which reinforced the sense of confinement. Shifting the cultivation of coffee to gardens was driven not only by the lack of sufficient waste land for large-scale production nearer to the peasant settlements, but also by the desire to keep both the coffee and the planters under close surveillance. Although the 'hedge' and *kampung* coffee continued to be grown for many more years it was considered less effective,

because it was small-scale and difficult to keep track of (De Haan I, 1910: 154). The distance between the peasants' homesteads, where they grew their food crops, and the coffee gardens where they worked for the colonial tribute was certainly a major nuisance. At first, efforts were made to keep the distance to a minimum. A modified instruction that came into force in 1805 contained the provision that the most suitable land must be chosen 'as close as possible to the *campongs*', but the decisive criterion was that the gardens must not be too far apart. This condition, stipulated for the convenience of the colonial inspectors, was given priority over the distance from the settlements. The order issued by Rolff when he was Commissioner in 1789 that every household had to tend to 1,000 coffee trees each year and to plant new trees until this number was reached, actually heralded the transition to larger-scale cultivation. Gardens with 200,000 trees or more needed a large area of forested land, and that lay beyond the zones where peasant agriculture was concentrated. The latter were located on lower ground in valleys where rivers or streams flowed, while coffee proved to thrive best on higher land in the mountains. This meant that the coffee planters not only had to cover great distances, but also differences in altitude, making the journey even longer and more laborious. While it might take 20 minutes to walk a pole's distance on flat ground, it could take twice as long climbing up a hillside. Rather than four hours, it would therefore require at least eight to reach a garden situated at a distance of 12 poles from a village.

Mobilizing labour

These large-scale enterprises may have been referred to as 'gardens', but they were in fact extensive plantations, prepared for cultivation by a large army of 1,000 or more menfolk recruited from far and wide. It was not uncommon for them to remain unproductive because the soil was not suitable, the trees were planted too close so that they grew together, or because the labourers deserted *en masse* due to bad treatment, lack of food and inadequate shelter during the cold nights and heavy rains. The term 'mountain plantations' is more accurate also because the mode of production differed substantially from the way coffee was grown in and around the villages. The work in the gardens was organized from the very beginning along more industrial lines. Early in the nineteenth century, an overseer was appointed to supervise the planters and ensure that the work progressed as it should in the different stages of production. He was in charge of a work gang, known as a *t'rup*, of some 30 to 50 labourers. This

mandador or *kepala t'rup* recruited the members of his gang from different settlements, brought them to the site of the new garden and stayed with them as long as the work of opening up the land lasted (De Haan III, 1912: 615). The peasants allocated to the gang boss planted and tended the trees and were joined by their wives and children for the duration of the harvest, who would help with the picking, peeling and drying of the beans. Above the gang boss was a *koemetir kopi*, who was usually in charge of three gangs and reported to a native supervisor in charge of coffee production, who was responsible for ensuring that everything went according to plan in his district. He had to keep a 'coffee book' (a register of names of all the gardens and gang bosses, together with the number of labourers they had working for them), report to the Coffee Sergeant and accompany the regent and *patih* when they made their tour of the gardens. In this way, the native management gradually became more structured.

How much time did the peasants spend on raising the tribute? Daendels' estimation of two months a year for each household was a wild guess with no basis in fact. The relocation of coffee cultivation to the hill plantations had increased the workload substantially. The order to maintain 1,000 trees a year was a shot in the dark, not based on what the peasants could reasonably be expected to produce, but on the growing demand for this colonial commodity on the global market. The price paid to the planter was completely out of proportion with the profits made first by the VOC and then the colonial government. The picking alone took the planter and his family several months each year, not to mention the work of laying out the garden, the processing of the beans and their compulsory delivery to the warehouses. De Haan did not venture to estimate how much time this took, but concluded cautiously that it must have imposed a considerable burden on the planters and their families (De Haan I, 1910: 159). It was not only the amount of time involved, but the extremely low price the planters received and the fact that they were not paid a single cent for all the work done until they delivered the coffee. The involvement of the other members of the household in growing the coffee occurred almost unnoticed. The early notion that the planter would tend to the coffee trees and pick the berries, while the other family members would grow food and do all the other work, had long become obsolete. The whole family was considered subject to the tribute and, by the end of the eighteenth century, what started as a secondary activity alongside meeting the household's basic needs, had become the peasants' household main occupation. According to the colonial wisdom of the time, the heavier burden would act as an incentive to the indigenous economy (De Salis 1809: 25).

Transporting the now much greater volume of coffee from the highlands to the coast continued to be a serious problem. On his arrival in 1808, Daendels noted that there were hardly any paved roads inland. Traffic had to use narrow tracks that were almost impassable during the monsoon. The construction, on Daendels' orders, of the *Grote Postweg*, the main road across Java, reduced the travelling time for mail and officials with their equipment but, to limit damage to this long-distance route, it was closed for the transport of coffee. The beans were largely carried to the warehouses using buffalo, of which there was a serious shortage. Nicolaus Engelhard had already issued a ban on the export of pack animals from the Priangan regencies as early as 1793. To prevent them from being requisitioned for the notorious coffee caravans, the peasants hid their draught animals, which they needed to tend their paddy fields, or sold them off. Some of them preferred to carry the coffee on their own backs and spare their animals, which were valuable and scarce possessions. They could transport the coffee on foot if they were permitted to deliver it to a small local depot nearby, even though this meant that they received a lower price for their corvee labour. The existing warehouses at Cikao and Karangsambung were considerably expanded to be able to deal with the much greater supply. The long waiting times on arrival and departure added to the privations that had to be endured during the journey. The footpaths taken by the caravans widened to become roads. In the bustle, animals were lost, injured or stolen, or died from exhaustion and lack of food. The journey progressed slowly through the difficult terrain, no more than a few poles a day, so that it might take more than two months to complete the return journey. There was an added risk of being robbed by gangs roving around in the hinterland in search of booty: labour and animals to work in the sugar mills around Batavia. Lawick refuted these accounts, saying that the highland peasants were not being robbed at all but were in fact selling their draught animals to free themselves of the claims made by their chiefs not only on their labour but also on their possessions (De Haan IV, 1912: 556).

The introduction of carts to transport coffee, an innovation that did not start to take off until after the turn of the century, was an enormous improvement. It happened gradually and at first only on a few stretches, because the state of the roads did not permit them to be more widely used. The most common form of carts, *pedatis,* could of course carry more coffee than the pack animals. But the heavy, cumbersome vehicles, with their large, solid wooden wheels took a long time to cover any distance and caused considerable damage to the roads they used. So much so that the following caravan would have to seek out a new track, resulting in three or

***Pedati*. From the beginning of the 19th century, these unwieldy and heavy peasant carts facilitated the transport of coffee from the hinterland to the Company's warehouses on the coast. The introduction of the *pedati* brought to an end the use of pack animals, mainly buffalo, for this purpose.**

Source: F. de Haan – Priangan, vl. 1, p. 165

four 'roads' running alongside each other. Using animals to pull the carts often meant that there were not enough left to plough the *sawahs* when they were most needed. Peasants' priorities naturally lay with producing food rather than delivering coffee. They sabotaged the additional task by burying the beans they had picked, throw the sacks in which they were packed away or get someone else to take the burden off their hands at no cost or even for payment. They did so as not to lose the use of their own labour power and that of their buffaloes when they were needed to meet their own basic needs. The colonial authorities were aware that the forced cultivation of coffee could jeopardize food production. In 1804, Pieter Engelhard noted an excessive shortage of rice in all regencies. Expansion of the fields planted with paddy progressed at an extremely slow pace. Resident Van Motman established in 1808 that the quantity of uncultivated land in the Priangan was many times larger than the area that had been

brought under cultivation: 'generally speaking, it is safe to estimate that two-thirds to three-quarters of these lands are uncultivated wilderness' (De Haan IV, 1912: 451). In 1809, the Prefect of the Cirebon Priangan Regencies reported to Daendels that the *sawahs* in his jurisdiction could only provide less than a third part of the food requirements of the population. The great majority of paddy was still grown on non-irrigated *tipar* and *gaga.* The forced labour in the coffee gardens meant that the peasants had insufficient time to convert the dry fields into *sawahs*. This explains why Daendels, in his usual commanding style, ordered expansion of the area of irrigated land and made the local chiefs responsible for keeping a close eye on the rhythm of the agrarian calendar (Van Deventer I, 1865: 31-3). It was their task to ensure that the peasants had sufficient cattle and tools to till the land and that sowing and harvesting were not delayed. That this work schedule had to be achieved within the bounds of a policy that gave absolute priority to the forced cultivation and delivery of increasing quantities of coffee was a consequence that the Marshall and his subordinates were not prepared to accept. Their refusal to do so was based on both a lack of factual knowledge and unwillingness to recognize that these objectives were incompatible.

Expansion of forced labour

Immediately on his arrival Daendels showed himself to be a confirmed supporter of the forced cultivation of coffee. He did not consider for one moment breaking with the old VOC regime as had been practised in the Priangan Regencies. He argued that the low state of development of the native population did not permit the transition to colonial production based on free labour. The Marshall resolutely rejected the argument that the Javanese had an aversion to the system of compulsory cultivation and delivery and wished instead to be recognized as the owners of the land they tilled. According to him, the peasants were accustomed to working for their chiefs since time immemorial and had no concept at all of agrarian property rights. As far as the situation in the Priangan lands was concerned, Daendels should have known better. In 1809 Lawick, at that time the Prefect of the Cirebon Priangan districts, had clarified to him that the land for growing crops did not belong to the regents. In Daendels' view, the state's forceful hand was necessary to ensure that the Javanese would pay their taxes without fail. The Governor-General even had his doubts if the incentive of compulsion could ever be lifted. He believed that these people had no other needs than to fulfil their absolutely basic requirements and were not willing

to work any harder than necessary to achieve this (Daendels 1814: 104). The ideas he had inherited from former VOC officials had also taught him that it would be highly inadvisable to encourage the peasants to want more than to satisfy their basic needs and to arouse a desire to aspire for progress that would make it difficult to maintain their current state of dependency. Pieter Engelhard had expressed this standpoint early in the nineteenth century and, in 1829, when he was a member of parliament, Daniël François van Alphen had also argued against enlightening the indigenous population of Java. The introduction of a form of government that would increase their freedom of thought and action was out of the question (De Haan IV, 1912: 738-9).

The notion that the cultivation and delivery of coffee was evenly distributed across the whole population was based on a far-reaching failure to acknowledge or, conversely, a desire to ignore the way in which local chiefs tried to manipulate the allocation of obligations in their own favour. Lawick satisfied the arbitrariness of the chiefs in distributing the workload unevenly in 1808 by agreeing to a regulation stipulating that peasants performing services for the regent or the district chiefs had to maintain only 500 rather than 1,000 trees. In 1810 he reported to Daendels that many of the peasants liable to cultivation services remained unaccounted for (*ibid*., 1912: 421). Possibly in response to reports of this nature, Daendels ordered in 1811 that, if segments of the population temporarily or permanently evaded work in the coffee gardens, the remainder would have to make up the shortfall. This meant that the number of trees that each household had to maintain could rise to as high as 3,900 (*ibid*.: 786). In effect, this instruction boiled down to the fact that the colonial high command in charge of coffee production did not care who did the work, as long as it got done. The official policy was, however, to ensure that the workload was evenly distributed and to put a stop to the arbitrary way in which the chiefs treated their subordinates by relieving some of them of the burden, while overloading others to way above the norm. In short, the pretence was maintained that the whole population was or should be involved in the forced cultivation and supply of coffee.

Daendels' attitude towards the gentry was far from accommodating and the way in which he treated them smacked of condescension. To make the difference in standing between them comprehensible, he gave them military ranks (Van Deventer I, 1865: 21) The Governor-General acknowledged that the chiefs were indispensable, as the inherent respect of the population for the aristocracy made it possible to continue and increase the cultivation of coffee. The peasants' subordination to their chiefs should not, however,

be preserved and acknowledged at the expense of the dominant role of the government. The regents were therefore deprived of a number of judicial and police tasks that they had hitherto performed. Limiting the space in which the chiefs were accustomed to operating demanded their explicit obedience to the authority of the colonial government. The local chiefs were integrated into the colonial apparatus by giving them the status of civil servants, albeit without salary. As before, their income remained linked to the coffee money they collected: the regents received a *rijksdaalder* for every *pikul* supplied within their area of jurisdiction, a quarter of which they had to pass on to the chiefs under their command. Although this represented a substantial income for the *patih* and *cutak* chiefs, those in the lower ranks of the indigenous administration earned very little. They made up for what they did not receive formally by appropriating part of the peasants' share. The European staff also shared in what was later to be called 'cultivation commission'. The Commissioner and his successor, the Prefect, received a quarter of a *rijksdaalder* per *pikul*, as did the Sergeant. Lastly, the warehouse masters also received a sizeable commission, on top of what they charged for storing the coffee beans and for organizing the transport to the coast. In addition to these legal dues, they kept for themselves part of the cash payments set aside for the peasants when they delivered the coffee.

Despite the condescension and disdain that the regents had to endure, they had no reason to complain in material terms. Daendels decided to write off the enormous advances they had received in successive instalments and which tied them in debt to their European superiors in the colonial apparatus. The steady rise in coffee production increased their wealth, which they used to live in great opulence, an ostentatious display in which their large entourage of lower chiefs-cum-clients shared. The position of the Sundanese landed gentry and clergy suddenly became even more comfortable when Daendels quite unexpectedly decided to increase the *cuke* that the peasants were obliged to surrender from a tenth to a fifth part of the rice harvest. In 1804, as Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, Lawick had informed his superiors who should benefit from this share, a motley crew of local chiefs. And this was not the last time the peasants' burden was increased. The early-colonial state, the foundation of which was laid by Daendels, imposed demands on the availability of labour free of charge for infrastructural works, including the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges, offices, warehouses and bungalows for officials, for the transport of goods, mail and the colonial bosses, and – not in the last instance – to enable expatriate officials to show their status in a similar way to the local chiefs – by having a retinue of minions at their disposal.

The Great Trunk Road with change of horses near Cianjur (photo pre-1880)

Source: KITLV Collection

De Haan established rightly that the term 'corvee services' only became popular in Daendels' time (I, 1910: 264). By mobilizing labour cost-free and on a large scale for shorter or longer periods for a wide range of activities, useful or not, the government made it clear that it was stepping into the shoes of the indigenous rulers. It was a continuation, at least so it was claimed, of a tribute that the people had been accustomed to pay from generation to generation. The obligation to cultivate coffee did not relieve the peasants from their duty to provide corvee services to their own lords, or only partially so. Lawick's report to Raffles on Bandung in 1812 referred to the *tugur*, the obligation of peasants to report to their chief for rendering corvee in large numbers in turn (De Haan II, 1911: 690-1).

Daendels originally intended to pay for the work done on building roads but failed to do so because of a lack of funds. The peasantry felt the pressure not only of the corvee labour itself, but also the callous treatment that accompanied it, while the risk of not surviving the brutality of the work regime drove many of them to desert. Even after the *Grote Postweg* was finished, a broad area along both sides of the road remained uninhabited. The inhabitants had every reason to believe that they would be forced to work whenever the government felt it necessary to repair the roads or for the

transport of goods and officials. Attempts to abscond were frustrated by the introduction of a rule that the whole population of a district was obliged to perform corvee services and could, if necessary, be set to work far from their homesteads. Requisitioning them cost nothing and the distance they had to travel was also of no relevance. After all, according to the stubborn but mistaken belief of the colonial rulers, the peasants had time on their hands.

A new measure was that all colonial buildings – including offices, checkpoints, warehouses and even dwellings – had to be guarded day and night. The early-colonial government took on the characteristics of a night-watch state, a regime of surveillance that gradually extended along roads and into villages (De Haan I, 1910: 262). Of course, the process of opening up the hinterland, which was now progressing more systematically, led to greater mobility and 'vagrants and beggars' perhaps made these regions less safe than before. But the new measures were not so much aimed at assuring security as equipping the colonial apparatus with a whole corps of guards, orderlies, messengers and other servants who made the lives of their colonial white masters more comfortable. A substantial part of these services were provided without payment. The Governor-General was permitted to requisition local people by the hundreds to work in his palace in Bogor, the Resident was allowed several dozen personal servants, while lower officials had to rely on a handful of guards and attendants to dignify their status. As mentioned above, Daendels was planning to alleviate the burden of corvee services and meant to use the records now kept by his subordinates to find out why and how to do this. They were full of complaints about the ease with which native chiefs obliged their subjects to displays of servitude. The rancour expressed in these reports mainly focused on the wastefulness of using subjects purely to satisfy a desire for prestige and finery, a contempt rooted in the perpetually severe shortage of labour for the coffee gardens. There was not a word, of course, about the free services enjoyed by the colonial officials themselves. Rather than contributing to economic growth, a large number of idlers and layabouts hung around the abodes of their masters of whatever complexion.

Beyond the reach of the government

Reducing the burden of the corvee services seems to have been commonly interpreted as restricting the entourage with which the landed gentry were accustomed to surrounding themselves. As early as 1804, Pieter Engelhard had tried to persuade the Regent of Bandung to call only on clients living in

the immediate vicinity of the headquarters to perform corvee services. All such attempts foundered on the obstinate refusal of the chiefs to abandon the displays of servitude by their clientele, which were so closely related to their prominent status. Out of desperation, the colonial authorities gave up trying on condition that 'following the chiefs around for no purpose' did not occur at the expense of coffee cultivation. Of course, it was the peasantry which paid the price for this uneasy compromise. Besides the greatly increased pressure of forced cultivation and the range of services performed for their own chiefs meant that the peasants were now faced with a staggering assortment of new corvee obligations that they had to fulfil for the government (Schoch 1891). The early-colonial state, of which Daendels was the architect, succeeded in turning the Priangan peasant into a coolie.

The Governor-General continued the policy of cordoning off the Sundanese highlands with great zeal. The increased insecurity in parts of the region fuelled fears that threats to law and order had to be prevented by reducing contact with the outside world to a minimum. Robbery, extortion, theft, looting and murder were the order of the day throughout the lands surrounding Batavia, a vast and unsettled area stretching out from the coast to the hills. Those with any form of property were the main victims of threats and bribery. Cock fighting, gambling and organized prostitution were accompanied by a great deal of violence. This was contrasted with the image of peace and security of which the inhabitants of the highlands were assured under their regents. Along the intermediate zone between the colonial headquarters and the hinterland, illegality and crime reached unprecedented proportions. Consignments of coffee that had been stolen or smuggled changed hands, there was a lively trade in stolen cattle, and small traders offered their wares, including opium, to customers who took these products with them on their long journey home. Around 1810, the south coast suffered from pirates from Riau, who penetrated the Priangan Regencies by sailing up the rivers from their base at Cilacap. Their raids, during which they abducted many hundreds of inhabitants to be sold into slavery, led to large-scale flight from Sukapura and Galuh.[19] Surrounded by these areas of persistent unrest, including the plain around Cirebon, the Priangan was sealed off to ensure the maintenance of law and order. Europeans, too, were permitted to travel through the region only if they

19 Piracy had reached alarming proportions by the second half of the nineteenth century and was closely connected to the political turbulence in the regions of the archipelago where these pirates-cum-traders came from: the islands in the Strait of Malacca and the adjoining coastal areas (Ota 2006: 124-8).

had a permit. The reluctance with which these licences were issued made it difficult to receive permission to enter the Priangan without connections high up in the colonial apparatus. It was even more difficult for Chinese because, as traders and moneylenders, they were considered to have a corruptive influence on the local inhabitants. An additional argument for restricting them in particular was that their economic activity distracted the peasants from growing coffee. The punishment for violating the ban was at least physical chastisement or even a year's imprisonment. When, under British rule, the ban on small traders settling in the region was less strictly enforced, it was the regents who insisted on the expulsion of all Chinese.[20] Discouraging economic activity therefore took place partly at the insistence of the native aristocracy. The reason they gave for not holding markets was that it would encourage the peasants to grow crops for trade at the expense of growing coffee. Summing up the available intelligence, De Haan said that a Priangan *pasar* gave a rather run-down impression. Where they were held, they were little more than a small collection of stalls for *sirih* (betel) and fruits, with a few others selling pots and pans, a little ironware and cheap linen. Only towards the end of periods of fasting, which the Sundanese people celebrated with meals that included buffalo meat, was trade a little more lively (De Haan I, 1910: 482). The freedom of movement of the local population was also restricted. When they were not at home, the only other place they were at liberty to be was in the coffee garden. They had no business going anywhere else. This restriction on movement was accompanied by an instruction that 'alien' natives – people whose place of origin was unknown – could not be offered accommodation without the regent first being informed. This was only the most recent in a long line of bans on 'vagrants' and 'deserters'. Establishing the Priangan as a reservation where the presence of outsiders was seen as a disruption of public order meant that the peasantry had contact only with the government through their local chiefs. This state of quarantine constituted an excessive reduction in their social life, even by the standards of the time.

On his arrival, Daendels had described the condition of the people of the Priangan as pitiful. But it is arguable whether this changed under his rule. Yet the Governor-General himself was proud of the progress he had achieved. He was convinced that growing coffee took up less than one-sixth of the peasants' time, and that they received a handsome reward for

20 Resident Macquoid explained why: '… from a conviction, they assure me, that their free intercourse with the Javanese inhabitants would in time be fatal to the tranquillity and happiness that has prevailed throughout the Regencies for so many years' (De Haan IV, 1912: 879).

their efforts. As a result of his benevolence, the natives had become 'much happier'. The proviso that he added to this – 'as happy as they could be in such an uncivilized state' – said more about the defects of Priangan man than the shortcomings of colonial rule. Daendels' opponents, however, held a different opinion. Van den Bosch spoke of the 'cruel and inhuman force' suffered by the coffee planters to ensure that 'these unfortunate wretches performed the hard tasks imposed upon them', which – not counting the transport of the coffee – meant that they were not able to do any other work for six months of the year. This harsh judgment reflected the disdain of Van den Bosch for the Marshall. It was, after all, on Daendels' orders that he had to leave the colony. In the light of the practices that took place 20 years later under his responsibility as founder of the cultivation system, his withering criticisms of Daendels – 'the rule of Robespierre was neither more cruel, nor more bloodthirsty' – are not very convincing. But there were other eyewitnesses, such as Nicolaus Engelhard. The former Commissioner, with his long service record, denounced in a retrospective the arbitrary and brutal regime that Daendels had pursued. The belated condemnation by this veteran in colonial service – made in 1816 when he had decided to take on the role of private landowner – rather detracted from what he had stated in a memorandum in 1805, questioning whether the further advancement of the Javanese people was in the interests of the home country. Back then, he had expressed the opinion that the Javanese had to be 'driven to work by force and with beatings, as though they were beasts' (De Haan I, 1910: 428). Are we then to assume that the founder of the early-colonial state did little more than act according to the spirit of the times? That he can be accused of nothing more than ensuring the preservation of an already existing regime simply because it generated the greatest profit? As compiler of the colonial archives, De Haan weighed up the merits of the different standpoints and came to the damning conclusion in which nothing remained of promises to improve the lot of the Javanese. On the contrary.

> Daendels wittingly lied, and out of self-interest, to re-enter state service. To achieve that, he not only had to make excuses for the way the people of the Priangan were treated, but also portray the coffee garden as a Sundanese heaven on earth. (De Haan I, 1910: 459)

The decision of the restored Dutch rulers in 1815 to maintain the land rent tax introduced by Raffles as the cornerstone of colonial policy, while introducing a different system in the Priangan Regencies, was grounded in the desire to continue coffee production on the old basis and to expand it

with a view to meeting the growing demand in the Atlantic world. In 1818, only a few years after Dutch rule had been restored, the price of a *pikul* of coffee had risen to more than double that of 1815 (Van Deventer 1891: CLXII). This robust position on a competitive and growing global market assured a golden future for the black beans. By 1822, worldwide consumption of coffee had risen to 225,000 tons, 100,000 tons of which came from the East Indies (Wild 2004: 99). This was nearly half of the total demand, and the major part of that was grown in the Sunda highlands. What measures were required to allow this staple product of the colonial economy to expand even more? Seasoned officials, with experience reaching back to long before Daendels, again held high-ranking positions in the government apparatus and their judgment carried a lot of weight now that it was necessary to set out a new course. Lawick was one of this small circle of adepts. The report he drew up in 1818 together with his deputy Van de Graaff focused on the question of how to proceed further with coffee production in the Priangan. Considerable attention was devoted to whether it might be better to abolish the system of forced cultivation and replace it with free labour. And if not, whether the peasants should be paid a better price than the pittance they currently received. The authors of the report acknowledged that this was an arguable proposition, given the enormous profits being made by the government. But this would mean abandoning the fundamental principle of the Priangan system, namely excluding all other options for securing the supply of coffee than paying the growers a minimum wage. They also claimed that there was no reason to increase the price because there was no pressure to do so (Lawick and Van de Graaff 1818). Developing these simple folk to the higher level of existence found elsewhere on Java would take time. Paying the peasants a higher price without reason to do so would only arouse the greed of the regents and chiefs. After all, they argued, the essence of the Priangan system was to acquire as much coffee as possible at the lowest possible price and supply it exclusively to the government (Lawick and Van de Graaff 1818: 5). The subordinate conduct displayed by the people of the Priangan was even more reason to assure the regents a good income and treat them with respect. Increasing the commission they received for supplying the coffee would also discourage them from taking part in the clandestine transport and sale of coffee. The people would however stand to benefit from the immediate abolition of the head tax. This annual monetary tribute had been imposed in the past, but was lifted when coffee was grown on an increasingly large scale. The tax had been reintroduced under British interim rule to replace the compulsory supply of coffee but was now abolished.

The obligation to perform coolie labour and the need for tight surveillance

The report therefore recommended preserving the government's monopoly and maximizing profit by maintaining the greatest possible difference between purchase cost and sales price. Remarkably, hardly six months previously, Lawick had expressed completely different sentiments. He had distanced himself from his earlier statement about the non-economic disposition of the native producer. Under Raffles' rule, this stereotypical standpoint from the VOC era had been rejected and the peasants were praised for their unremitting zest for work. Lawick had joined these voices of praise just in time and, in 1817, showed that he still adhered to this changed viewpoint, declaring: 'I cannot agree with the views of so many, that the Javanese are lazy' (De Haan IV, 1912: 733). There could therefore be only one reason for forcing the peasants to grow and supply coffee: to deprive them of any benefit at all from the proceeds of this cash crop. A private landowner wrote in 1816 that, during the peak of the harvest, the whole population – including women, children and the elderly – was driven to the coffee gardens when the work bosses gave the order: 'the *mandur* called this *"giring",* a round-up' (De Haan III, 1911: 614). When in 1818, as Land-Rent Inspector, Lawick expressed in the strongest of terms his ardent support for continuing this policy of repression and exploitation, he departed from what he had said only a short time before about the Priangan peasant: 'Because of the current bad practices and failing management, the unfortunate coffee planter does not even have sufficient time over to till his own paddy field' (De Haan III, 1912: 627). It was a critical note that was flagrantly incompatible with the main recommendation of the coffee report that he submitted to his superiors only a few months later. He and his deputy must have concluded that the most important consideration had to be given priority, and that was the interests of the colonial ruler over and above those of the native population.

Criticism of this viewpoint, so easy to make with hindsight, can be countered with the well-known argument that the spirit of the times allowed no other course than to give priority to acquiring the highest profit possible at any price from conquered colonial possessions. As a close associate of Raffles, Muntinghe may also have expressed the greatest appreciation for the diligence and perseverance of the Javanese peasants, but that admiration did not prevent him from announcing that colonies existed to serve the interests of the metropolis. Yet there were contemporaries who immediately and vehemently opposed the advice presented by Lawick and

Van de Graaff. The former in particular was the butt of much criticism, with Nicolaus Engelhard and De Wilde referring to his long and intimate familiarity with the situation in the Priangan. The critics were themselves no less experienced in these matters than their opponent. Engelhard was Commissioner when Lawick was still in the early stages of his long career and De Wilde had been Inspector of the Coffee in Cianjur before Raffles took him under his wing and he became a partner in the purchase of Sukabumi. His ownership of this enormous estate, with Engelhard as a silent partner, brought both of them into conflict with Lawick (see Chapter IV). Their dispute with him about their private economic enterprise gave them the opportunity to express their aversion to the treatment of the Priangan peasantry and to respond with indignation to the resolute refusal of the Land-Rent Inspector to pay a single cent more for the coffee. Nicolaus Engelhard, who in his previous position as Commissioner had called the peasants lazy and slothful and said that they could only be galvanized into action to satisfy their own limited needs, showed himself now to be seriously concerned about these people, who were the victims of a tortuous mode of production (De Haan IV, 1912: 814-5). De Wilde was equally damning in his retrospective (1838: 181).

Perhaps in anticipation of such criticism, Lawick and Van de Graaff tried to argue that the inhabitants of the Priangan were still on a very low rung of civilization and had no other needs than to secure their basic means of subsistence. This justification, too, dated back to the Company era. They saw a contrast between the situation in the Sunda highlands and the social climate that had developed elsewhere on Java. There, the people were free to dispose of the fruits of their labour as they wished and had gradually achieved a somewhat higher level of well-being. The Inspector and his Deputy, however, warned against pursuing this example too hastily as the regime of subordination under which the peasants lived meant that any higher payment would not find its way to them but would end up in the pockets of their lords. From this perspective, underpayment was an instrument to encourage progress, but at the slowest possible pace. In a letter to Nicolaus Engelhard in 1826, Jean Chrétien Baud explained why a little progress, though not too much, should also be seen as serving the interests of the metropolis. He wrote:

> I am by no means a supporter of the reckless emancipation and civilization of the Natives, that can be found in some systems; on the contrary, I believe that they should be kept in a childlike state as long as possible, to enable the exercise of paternal control over them with ease. (De Haan IV, 1912: 739)

This high-ranking colonial policy-maker advocated allowing the natives to 'accumulate a little capital' to enable them to buy Dutch products. Forced cultivation, which was an obstacle to such accumulation, was therefore to be rejected; as was freedom, since this only made the natives idle. In this interpretation, Baud – who took over leadership of the cultivation system from Van den Bosch as Governor-General and later served as Minister for the Colonies – rejected forced cultivation not because it was in itself reprehensible but because it frustrated accumulation of the minimal assets required to allow the development of a native market for industrial products from Europe.

Lawick and Van de Graaff also called for another organizing principle of the Priangan system to be preserved. A decision had already been taken earlier to maintain the leadership of the chiefs over their subjects rather than place the latter under the direct authority of the government. The reporters supported their plea not to change this regime by arguing that the peasants were only prepared to do what the government asked out of deferent obedience to their own lords. Accepting their subordination to the regent was the best way of safeguarding the colonial tribute. Resident Van Motman's statement in 1816 that, left to their own devices, the inhabitants of the Priangan would prefer to grow rice, needed no substantiation: the chiefs were necessary to supervise the cultivation and delivery of coffee. In reply to the question why the colonial authority would be incapable of achieving the same objective, Engelhard had replied – and he spoke from his own experience – that the native chiefs had hundreds of means of persuasion which the European officials knew nothing about.

The Commissioners-General took this advice on board, as a result of which – by contrast with the rest of Java – the state of indirect rule persisted in the Priangan. The policy was, however, not pursued with any great conviction. Van der Capellen, who remained in command after the departure of the other Commissioners-General, stated that it would have been different 'if the native population had possessed a greater capability to fulfil the obligations imposed on them directly by the European authorities' (Van Deventer II, 1866: 56). The decision to settle for a 'for lack of better' solution could therefore be attributed to the shortcomings of the natives rather than to the unreasonable demands imposed on them by their colonial rulers. There was no choice but to involve the local chiefs, though their room for manoeuvre was to be limited so that their actions did not constitute a threat to the established order. Lawick and Van de Graaff warned, however, that the elevated status of the regents and the duty of the peasants to obey them unreservedly should be heeded with alacrity. Persistent belittling

of the gentry could lead them to neglect the tasks entrusted to them and that must be avoided at all costs. They added that the *pikul* money paid to the local chiefs should be increased to secure their loyalty and devotion, and that the Resident, together with the coffee sergeants and warehouse masters (one for each regency), should also receive a higher commission to secure their interest in coffee production. In other words, the native and European managers were entitled to what was withheld from the peasants.

Commissioner-General Van der Capellen was amenable to treating the local chiefs with courtesy, feeling himself that this had been lacking under Daendels. During his first inspection tour, he had noticed the disdain which almost all the regents had to suffer. In his view, this was a legacy of Daendels, under whose rule the regents' authority and income had been destroyed. They had to surrender their lands, on which their patron-client relationship with the peasantry rested. It was a radical reform in which the Commissioners-General that followed him had acquiesced. The remuneration paid to the nobility since then in no way compensated for this loss. Certainly, European officials could act as a buffer to protect the peasants against repression by their lords, but it should be realized that what outsiders saw as extortion was deeply embedded in traditional institutions. Preserving them made it possible to impose burdens on the colonial subjects, 'which would have driven any other people to desperation and rebellion' (Van Deventer II, 1866: 57).

In 1820, to make the local chiefs feel that they were important, Commissioner-General Godert van der Capellen announced a regulation describing their rankings and the rights and duties associated with them. The first article stated that the Resident, the European official in charge of the Priangan, should treat the regent as his younger brother. The subsequent provisions stipulated the variety of tasks entrusted to the local chiefs: to promote agriculture, improve transport, educate the people, guarantee their security, ensure they practised their religion, act against malevolent elements, mobilize labour, and keep records and statistics. Their tasks did not, however, include imposing and collecting taxes or managing the government's warehouses; nor were they permitted to operate as agro-industrial entrepreneurs in their own right, do business with the government or set themselves up as contractors or suppliers. This meant that the chiefs were not permitted to engage in economic activity at their own risk and expense. Their public role became purely decorative, reduced to displays of prestige and, of course, mobilizing the population to grow coffee. Measures had to be taken to ensure that they did not appropriate part of the coffee intended for delivery to the

warehouses to sell at a higher price on the coast. To combat this 'silent profit', it was necessary to keep a close eye on the chiefs' activities. In his annual reports, the Resident noted that most district chiefs had no other choice than to supplement their very meagre income by illicit means so as to keep up the appearances required by their status. In these minutes, sent to his brother the Commissioner-General in Batavia, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies Robert van der Capellen described in detail the code of conduct he observed.

> The native – from the regent down to the most humble peasant – is very difficult to understand. To hide nothing from them, to approach them openly and, as I have noted in every report, to treat them completely unselfishly and candidly with composure, the necessary firmness and never to waiver in giving orders or to retract them, is certainly the best way to ensure they serve as is required. (Algemeen Verslag van den Resident der Preanger Regentschappen over 1822, 7 February 1823. NA, Baud collection, 90)

The subject was once again addressed in the report for the following year and the Resident clarified that a benign but aloof attitude towards the regents was the secret of a successful policy. Confining the local lords in the colonial harness was mitigated by permitting them to display their dignity. They did this by decking themselves out with insignia, official uniforms and other paraphernalia like *payungs,* parasols that showed the rank and standing of their owners by their colours and the width of the gilded rings with which they were decorated. Although severe sanctions awaited those who wore these signs of distinction without being authorized to do so, it proved necessary in 1837 to modify the guidelines. Native dignitaries had adopted the habit of decorating their costumes with golden trimmings and embroidery that made them look suspiciously like the ornamental uniforms of Dutch civil servants. This resemblance was of course inadmissible. A regulation in 1820 stated that rank and stand should be distinguished by the size of a dignitary's retinue. An *adhipatti*, for example, as the regent's deputy, and his immediate family were permitted an entourage of 65 servants, while the next on the list, the *tommengong*, together with his wife and sons, was allowed 50 servants. This went down to the lowest levels, where local chiefs had to make do with just a few servants. Nearly half a century later it became clear that the lords of the Priangan had blatantly ignored the instruction to cut back on the number of servants in their service.

In search of the hidden labour reserve

An extremely important point that Lawick and Van de Graaff addressed in their report was the discrepancy that they identified between the total number of households and those of coffee planters. Since there were far fewer of the latter than the former, they concluded that there was a serious problem of underused capacity. There must be a large pool of labour that remained largely or completely exempt from the tribute. The households, registered as *cacah kopi*, were responsible for planting, maintaining and harvesting the beans from 1,000 trees a year. But, as the reporters explained, they were not the equivalent of a household in Europe, but could comprise a composite formation consisting of four nuclear households. They had also ascertained that, in Limbangan and elsewhere, there were around 50 per cent more planters than appeared in the records. This reinforced their belief that coffee cultivation was not evenly distributed among the districts and households. They were not concerned, however, about the injustice of this situation, the possibility of distributing the burden more evenly so as to alleviate it for all. Their conclusion from this discovery was that there was a reserve of hidden labour, which should not be exempt from efforts to increase production. The reporters suggested that their superiors commission a survey to determine the exact size of the population of each district and how many people actually comprised a *cacah kopi*. What also had to be determined was the distances from the gardens to the warehouses and what means of transport were available. They emphasized that it would be inadvisable to rely on the information provided by the local chiefs, but to order colonial officials to collect and check the figures. This follow-up study was conducted in 1821 and the results became available the following year. The immediate reason for the study was the regrettable fall in the volume of coffee produced under the forced cultivation system in the previous years. Van Haak, Inspector of Finances, was the man entrusted with establishing the causes of this unexpected decline. He took his task very seriously, visiting 460 coffee plantations throughout the region in only 126 days. This site-level investigation enabled the Inspector to identify the greatest obstacles to the cultivation and delivery of the crop. He started his report by referring to the discrepancy between the number of planters and the total stock of fruit-bearing trees. This meant that the households charged with growing the coffee did not attain the target of 1,000 trees a year that still applied to them. He offered various explanations for the shortfall. First of all, under British rule, a large number of gardens had been destroyed or so neglected that their productivity had been seriously affected. In addition,

in the years of restoration after the British left, in the haste to expand the gardens, the new trees were not always planted in suitable soil, so that many of them, once they had reached maturity, produced only a meagre harvest, if at all. It had however become clear that mountain plantations like those in Bandung were thriving. The disappointing results were thus only temporary and, if the course set out was followed resolutely, production would soon recover.

There was some improvement in the transport of the coffee. Cart tracks had been laid from the plantations to the warehouses, making transport easier and increasing the volume. The regents were encouraged to solve the shortage of carts – they could obtain advances from the government to pay for *pedatis* to be made and to buy draught animals – but the end of the buffalo caravans, in which many hundreds of these pack animals lumbered on for several weeks, was nowhere in sight. The Inspector was concerned about the widespread smuggling of coffee, but how was this problem to be tackled if the huge gap between purchase cost and sale price could not be reduced? It was a veiled but futile attempt to persuade his superiors to pay the peasants better. The isolation of the Priangan Regencies had become porous under British rule. Chinese merchants roamed the region, buying coffee from the peasants and selling them simple consumer goods. After Dutch rule was restored, the policy of isolation was resolutely re-imposed. In 1820, the ban on being found out in the Sunda highlands without permission was reintroduced, and applied to both Asians from outside the region and to Europeans.

The first *controleurs* – junior officials in charge of a district – were now being introduced in the residency, but Van Haak observed that these civil servants were still sadly lacking in the required expertise. Although they were responsible for checking on coffee production, they were unable to do so effectively because they understood neither the crop nor the language. Their interaction with the chiefs was restricted to superficial contact and they were even further removed from the population at large. In the opinion of the Inspector, the 1820 Regulation on the proper treatment of the native aristocracy fell short in addressing the grievances of the regents. Acceptance that the chiefs were indispensable in directing the production of coffee did nothing to alter the deplorable contempt with which they were treated. The loss of prestige of the lords of the land had not escaped the notice of the common man and this awareness only exacerbated the chiefs' humiliation and demoralization. They had been relieved of all financial management responsibilities and were disdainful of the close surveillance of their every move by young colonial officials with neither experience nor knowledge of

the local situation. Van Haak gave an interesting sketch of the Sundanese character. He had been struck by the frankness with which the people approached their chiefs, an assertion which in his opinion was a trait of all mountain-dwellers. This squarely opposes the stereotypical image of a subordinate and docile peasantry. The intractability that the Inspector of Finances described cast doubt not only on the notion of listless subalternity that made the Sundanese peasant grow coffee, but also on the idea that the regents were able to force their subjects to accept an advanced state of servitude. The nature of the people of the Priangan, as described by Van Haak, seems more applicable to the conduct of peasants who were not yet tied closely to the land, i.e. the tillers of *gaga* and *tipar*. In this connection I would like to recall that in one district of Sumedang, the first *sawahs* were not laid out until around 1822 (Eindresumé II, 1880: 33; De Haan IV, 1912: 444). Van Haak's report dated from a period in which shifting cultivation was still widely practised and, as described in Chapter I, this method of food production generated a completely different interaction between the peasants and the landed gentry than the closed village system typical of sedentary and wet-land agriculture on the coastal plain.

Van Haak also commented on the contraction and dedifferentiation of the Priangan peasant economy over a prolonged period. The inhabitants had been accustomed in the past to making their own clothes, as Jacob Mossel had reported in 1751 (Van Rees 1867: 484-5). According to Nederburgh, in the late nineteenth century 'home-grown and spun cotton was used for weaving in all *campongs*' (*Consideratiën*, 1855: 125) while in 1809, in reply to a question about the economic activity in the Priangan Regencies, Van Motman said that, although spinning had become less common, each family still had its own weaving loom and manufactured its own linen. The tradition came to an end when the peasants no longer had time to do anything other than grow paddy and coffee. Van Haak concluded in no uncertain terms hardly ten years later that cottage industry had ceased to exist. This meant that the peasants were forced to buy cloth that had been manufactured elsewhere. On the orders of the lower chiefs, the drivers of the pack animals bought clothing and other wares from merchants who plied their trades around the warehouses. When they came back, these foreign goods were sold on local markets for a much higher price. But because of the peasants' low purchasing power, this trade remained very modest, as the Statistische Beschrijving (Statistical Account) of 1822 made clear (De Haan IV, 1912: 889; see also De Wilde 1830: 141).

An outbreak of cholera in 1822 had reduced rice production. The price shot up, also because of the continued export to Batavia and the surrounding

Ommelanden. This resulted in a shortage of food for the inhabitants of the Priangan. Resident Van der Capellen also referred to these shortages, which most seriously affected the poorest of the coffee planters, in his annual reports.[21] Peasants even sold their stock of seeds, and were thus unable to plant the next season's crop. In response to these reports, Van der Capellen announced a ban on the export of rice and gave orders to expel bulk buyers of paddy and buffalo from the region. This failed to solve the problem that the peasants did not have enough spare time to grow food because their labour was nearly entirely taken up by coffee cultivation. That led to famine and they had no other choice than to eat wild roots for months at a time just to survive. They supplemented this deficient diet with boiled *pisang* stems and leaves. Van Haak accompanied his warning that food cultivation should not be neglected with the additional comment, however, that paddy should of course not be grown at the expense of coffee. In an annex, he discussed the concept of a *cacah kopi*, explaining that the term referred not to a single man but to a composite household and, without going into detail about its exact size, stated that it was the responsibility of all the members to take part in the cultivation of coffee. This formalized the long-standing practice of laying claim to the labour of men, women and children to grow this export crop. It was the only way to ensure that the colonial tribute could continue to be fixed at 1,000 mature trees per household.

In previous years, there had been little change in the slow growth of the population. The Priangan coffee regime made it a less than attractive prospect for inhabitants of the much more densely populated neighbouring regions, such as those along the north coast of Central Java, to settle down in the Sunda highlands. Added to this was the high mortality rate, a direct result of epidemics or malnutrition, which claimed many victims among the young in particular. As vaccination against smallpox became more widespread, deaths from this disease declined. This improvement followed the decision to entrust inoculation to the clergy, for which De Wilde had taken the initiative in 1820 (Kalff 1923). The village priests proved better at fulfilling this task than the European coffee sergeants had been (Geographische en statistische bijzonderheden 1835: 71). It took some effort to train them to administer the vaccinations but, after a few years, the number of vaccinated children increased rapidly, leading to a fall in mortality among the young. A more important cause of the low population density, however, was the fact that a large number of inhabitants did not appear in the colonial

21 Algemeen Verslag van den Resident der Preanger Regentschappen over 1822, 13 March 1822. NA, Baud collection, 90.

records. The high tribute meant that both higher and lower chiefs had an interest in recording lower population numbers, and the headcounts they were required to carry out were very unreliable. The authorities had good reason to suspect that the discrepancy between real and submitted numbers continued to be substantial. It was clear that the accelerated population growth at the end of the 1820s was due more to improved record-keeping than any sudden increase in actual numbers of inhabitants. This meant that more hands became available to grow coffee, but it was still not enough.

Indispensability of the chiefs, for the time being

The critical attitude towards regents and the Priangan gentry at large that was prevalent especially in Daendels' time, was now reversed. The more favourable light in which they were seen by the restored Dutch administration was however limited to the insight that continued reliance on this intermediate layer between rulers and ruled was essential to the effective exercise of power. In 1818, the Chief Inspector for Coffee Cultivation strongly recommended granting the chiefs the dignity they demanded. Only a few years later, this tactical advice proved not to go far enough for Commissioner-General Van der Capellen. In 1822, fulminating against private estate owners and other members of the old guard, he posed the problem in much more principled terms. The author of the 1822 colonization report summed up this revised opinion succinctly. The argument now was that, in the past, the native chiefs had been treated with too little respect. This recognition of their political role, however, brought no change in the belief that the feudal lords conducted themselves as parasites in their dealings with the peasantry.

I have ascribed the oscillations in colonial policy in the early decades of the nineteenth century to the strongly fluctuating opinions of the state-makers regarding the economic course to be followed. The continuing inadequate understanding how indigenous society was structured played an important role in this respect. The old guard would exaggerate their knowledge of the country and its people to the newcomers. But this experience, gained from daily practice, did not go very deep. They had hardly made a start on a more systematic management of economy and society. Both Daendels and Raffles ordered that a register be set up and maintained listing numerous details of every peasant locality on Java. The instructions of both governors came little further than good intentions, largely because there was insufficient attention and capacity in the meagre administrative apparatus to perform

this task. It proved not only difficult to gather all the information required but also to process it and translate it into clear-cut instructions. That this gradually improved is illustrated by the setting up of separate offices, for example for financial administration and for land registration (the Land-Rent Inspectorate in 1817). Affiliated to this agency was an Inspectorate for Coffee Cultivation on Java, headed by an official appointed by Daendels in 1808. From 1820, Residents had to submit annual reports and, when they left office, had to leave a memorandum of transfer for their successor. Lastly, in addition to the regular administration, special enquiries were initiated which were considered necessary to build up a comprehensive statistical database (Kommers 1979; Stevens 1982: 85-94). Although progress was made in counting, measuring and weighing, registering and classifying, it should not be forgotten that the figures and other data presented were not infrequently to a large degree the product of the imagination of those who gathered them, who had to rely on what the local chiefs told them. The chiefs' desire to above all please their superiors, as well as to keep them in the dark, meant that large areas of the colonized landscape remained opaque to the small group of colonial administrators who were presented with a strongly distorted portrayal of the situation. Elout blamed the incomplete and incorrect reporting on the inferior quality of those who had come from the metropolis for a career in the colonial civil service.

> '... what do we do with people who are on the drink, who combine conceitedness with shamelessness, while they lack any merit to speak of?' Thus complained the Commissioner-General in a letter to the Director of the Colonies. (Van Deventer 1891: 186)

'The era of doubt', was how Stokvis (1922: 27) described the years following the restoration of Dutch rule. But behind the capricious fluctuations in the standpoints of the colonial state-makers, a policy line gradually emerged which would leave its mark on the mode of economic exploitation for another half a century. The debate on what to do with the Asian colony, how to drain a sizable surplus from the overseas possessions, which had been extracted since the beginning of the century, was in fact the Dutch variant of the discussion going on around the same time between English utilitarians on the shape and direction of British policy in India (Stokes 1959). A modality of colonial management that was soon rejected for Java was to rely on the economic rationality of the peasant population. Despite a number of prominent advocates of this school of thought – Dirk van Hogendorp, Raffles and Van der Capellen, with Muntinghe as the link between

the last two – the prevailing view was that the native peasant lacked the incentive of enlightened self-interest and the urge for accumulation that was required to raise production and improve their living standards. In his colonization report, dated 1827, Willem van Hogendorp[22] stated once again 'that the population is incapable of exerting any kind of industrious effort, no matter for what purpose. (in Steijn Parvé 1851: 22).

In the debate on what kind of policy should be pursued, the applicability of the economic rationale in a colonial setting was repeatedly questioned. Perhaps not only the Javanese peasants but also the colonists imported from Europe failed to act as expected of *homo economicus*. The owners of the private estates seemed to prefer trade and speculation to agro-industry and adopted a lifestyle that was more feudal than capitalist. They were only prepared to act as entrepreneurs if, along with the land, they were also allowed to make use of the labour power of the peasants at a price far below the real market value of both of these factors of production. This made the question of whether they were pro or anti liberal much more ambiguous. The parties in the discussion on the best course to adopt had little difficulty agreeing that free labour could not form the basis of capitalist enterprise. Viscount Du Bus de Gisignies may have based his plans on the assumption that the Javanese would report for work on the newly cultivated lands in great numbers and of their own free will, but his argument did not stand the test of experience. Without the use of force, both the old and the new generation of landowners believed that they would not be able to find the labour they needed in sufficient numbers. The principle of free labour was hardly a point of discussion. A much more important issue was the choice between market or state, with the advocates of private initiative on one side and an economy regulated by government on the other. The latter won the day, above all because of the much higher profits that the metropolis expected from this regime. This prognosis was by no means purely hypothetical. The Priangan system was based on a long-established monopoly from which it could be concluded that the low costs of the system of forced cultivation and delivery – for the state at least – resulted in very high profits. But did these benefits outweigh the costs? There were a few critics at the time who protested at the state of unfreedom in which the

22 The Van Hogendorps belonged to a family of politicians well connected first to the Dutch republic at the end of the 18th century and then to the restored monarchy. Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp was one of a small clique which paved the way for Willem I to the throne in 1815. His younger brother Dirk made his career in the colony and it was following his track that Willem, son of Gijsbert Karel, went to Java as secretary to Commissioner-General Du Bus de Gisignies.

people were forced to live. Pieter de Haan used the term 'political slavery' to condemn the colonial regime on Java and this applied especially to the system of forced coffee cultivation in the Priangan Regencies. The shifting cultivation that the peasants had practised in the region was, in his view, not a form of primitive farming but a mode of production that enabled them to escape the hated and feared forced cultivation of coffee. He described how many died of need, while others fled to uninhabited regions and survived by growing mountain rice or by eating only roots (P. de Haan 1829: 182).

Colonial archivist Frederik de Haan stated plainly that it had never been the intention of the VOC to use the system of coffee cultivation to guide the people of the Priangan on the road to progress (De Haan I, 1910: 144). But in the nineteenth century a justification was needed to continue the system of forced cultivation and that pretext was found in the alleged non-economic mentality of the peasantry. The need to turn the colony into an enterprise that was highly profitable for the metropolis continued to be the main concern and one which, since the state coffers were exhausted, was given the highest priority. To fulfil this mission, someone was required who was decisive and self-assured, a strong character driven by the right ideas and the capacity to put them into practice. The man who fitted the bill was Johannes van den Bosch, who had previously been on Java and had completed several important state missions for the King, including a reorganization of the West Indian possessions. When, in 1829, he was presented with the plans devised by Du Bus de Gisignies, Van den Bosch reacted very sceptically. His critical comments were driven by both pragmatic and more principled considerations. He noted that using Javanese wage labour to open up new land was going to be a time-consuming business and required large investments that would only generate financial returns after many years. A more substantial argument was that the course proposed by Du Bus de Gisignies was incompatible with the current backward state of native society. In a study published ten years earlier on how the Netherlands should manage its overseas territories, Van den Bosch had emphasized the importance of a manner of colonial rule that was as compatible as possible with the institutions of the country and its people. His advice on how to proceed in the East Indies fulfilled these criteria and promised the so desperately desired profits to pay off the runaway Dutch national debt in a much shorter time. King Willem I was convinced, undoubtedly for this last reason, and decided to send his counsellor to the colony as Governor-General.

The cultivation system introduced by Van den Bosch in 1830 forced the peasant population in large parts of Java to grow various crops and supply them to the colonial government for export. The new agrarian regime

represented on the one hand a return to the system of forced cultivation and delivery imposed primarily on the inhabitants of the Priangan by the VOC from the early eighteenth century onwards, but it also reflected an acceleration in the process of globalization. That process crystallized into a restructuring of the international division of labour between 'West' and 'East'. In the specific case of the East Indies, Van den Bosch set himself the goal of promoting economic growth on Java and making it competitive with the slave-labour-based production of tropical crops in the West Indies as a supplier of agrarian products to the industrializing and urbanizing world in the northern hemisphere. After the VOC was disbanded, a few high-profile colonial reformers had in the early decades of the nineteenth century taken a principled stand against continuing the forced cultivation of coffee in the Priangan and everything associated with it, including extremely low payments to the producers, preserving the authority of the native chiefs, and the government monopoly on buying the products. In the new revisionist view, this mode of production had become outdated. The top of the colonial apparatus could only justify the temporary continuation of the system in the highlands of West Java with the argument that these revenues remained as yet indispensable. Not only to cover a wide range of expenses – the high cost of the Java War (1825-30) in particular – , but also and especially to demonstrate to King Willem I and his advisers in the metropolis the profitability of the overseas possessions. Preserving an aberration of what was intended to become the general modality of collecting taxes seems to have embarrassed the policy-makers. In their final report to the Minister, the Commissioners-General returned to the question of whether it was advisable to continue the regime in the Priangan Regencies on the old footing or whether it would perhaps be more efficient to introduce the land rent system here, too. Their conclusion, however, was a resounding 'No' to the latter option. They turned the lack of uniformity in the system now into a recommendation for pluriformity (Report of 16 March, 1818, Van Deventer I, 1865: 393). In later arguments, the apology for the failure to standardize the revenue policy throughout Java would be deftly transformed into a plea to, above all, take account of 'historically developed relations', thus justifying diversity on the basis of an imagined tradition.

The Priangan variant as a 'colonial constant'

The Priangan coffee regime, which had survived into the early decades of the nineteenth century as a backward remnant of early-colonial exploitation,

now served as a model for establishing the cultivation system. Van den Bosch aimed not only to increase cash crop production on Java but also to extract a greater surplus from it. Although he never tired of repeating that peace and order could only be assured if the prevailing situation was disrupted as little as possible and rejected out of hand any whisper of reform, far-reaching changes in the nature of the Javanese peasant economy and society were set in motion under his rule. The ultimate aim of colonial domination remained the same as at the start of the process of state-building. Van den Bosch left no doubt at all that the East Indies were conquered territory. The people had the right to good governance and could expect their own institutions to be respected as far as possible. But, having said that, he added immediately, 'For the rest, the interests of these lands should be completely subordinate to those of the Mother Country.' The coercion inherent in the cultivation system implied not only the obligation to provide the required labour, but also to accept the unilaterally imposed compensation for the export crops produced without complaint. As had traditionally been the 'custom' with the compulsory supply of goods, there would be no bargaining about the price. The native races of the tropics had a natural tendency to sloth and indolence. There was no alternative to the use of force, and that applied equally to growing coffee, which would not succeed without rigorous discipline being imposed by the government. Free labour was an illusion, and perhaps always would be. As Van den Bosch insisted also in retrospect:

> With a people, that can hardly be compared with our own children at the age of 12 or 13, no arrangements or institutions should be expected, through which the fruits of labour as referred to above, would be distributed fairly, and to achieve that through the influence of an extremely limited number of officials spread widely among millions of inlanders, of whom less than a dozen understand their language reasonably, is equally impossible, so that the *dessa* dwellers too leave command over their harvest entirely to their chiefs. (Van den Bosch 1864: 79)

If the absence of a work ethic could not be seen as a genetic trait, the cause was found to lie in the morals and customs that had dominated the lives of the Javanese since time immemorial. This reference to an ancient tradition was very useful to Van den Bosch, as it enabled him to reduce the payment the peasants received for their forced labour to the lowest conceivable level. A precondition for the success of this policy was to keep the people of the Priangan in an advanced state of quarantine, as contacts with the outside world could be expected to increase their aspirations. This ran counter to

the colonial interest, which required that nothing should be permitted that might arouse a desire among the people for more assets or introduce new customs that would disrupt the simplicity of peasant life.

Money was also saved by cutting back on the costs of imposing discipline, that is to say all expenditures relating to supervising the introduction of and compliance with the cultivation system. Increasing the peasants' agrarian production was achieved by delegating this responsibility from the government to native intermediaries. Recognizing 'traditional' holders of authority had the advantage of being a mode of cheap governance. What it came down to was that the peasants themselves paid the bill for their exploitation and subordination. The frequently heard suggestion that the colonial government restored the former dignity of the native chiefs is misconceived. The state apparatus had indeed become less feudal and more bureaucratic under Daendels. The deposition of the landed gentry from their former positions of authority may have been reversed to a certain degree in the years that followed, but this by no means constituted a process of re-feudalization. Relatively strict rules were imposed to avoid the highhanded and whimsical way in which the native aristocracy had acted in earlier times. As officials integrated in the colonial administration, the regents and lower dignitaries were placed under the stewardship of white superiors, which significantly restricted their freedom of operation. This all applied to a much lesser extent to the Priangan region, where the authority of the native chiefs retained a real significance, also under the newly introduced cultivation system. Since the start of the system of compulsory supply by the VOC in the early eighteenth century, this tried and tested practice continued to exist in the highlands of Sunda until deep into the nineteenth century, even after the colony had been transformed into a state domain. The cultivation system, which came later and lasted for not yet half a century, had a much less impressive track record. The Priangan regents had more autonomy than their counterparts elsewhere, including the right to collect tribute, while expatriate officials enjoyed less authority than elsewhere on Java. The region that the VOC had first laid claim to was not integrated into the land rent system but had to continue to produce crops for export. When more modern forms of government were introduced on Java, first by Daendels and then Raffles, it became common to speak of 'the Priangan system', and from 1816 the term was also used in official documents. The term is misleading, not only because it never became a fully fledged system – the administrators simply continued with what others before them had decided – but also because it was not the Priangan that adopted a new course, but the rest of Java. The regime in the region was therefore not an 'exception',

as has often been suggested, but had been a constant feature throughout the history of the colony. It became an unequalled success formula for the colonial exploitation of the East Indies, surviving from around 1720 until 1871 – a good century and a half. The Priangan was transformed, but as a gradually evolving economic, political and social order rather than a system as such, into a strangulated mode of production based on coercion and a whole network of arrangements that as good as excluded change, from within or outside.

In colonial circles, there was a tendency to attribute the exercise of force inherent to the cultivation system to shortcomings in the inborn non-economic mentality of the Javanese, perhaps in combination with historical circumstances. An alternative explanation was suggested by ethnologist Herman Nieboer, who made the connection between regimes of open versus closed resources. If land is not a scarce commodity, he argued, people will not freely place their labour power at another's disposal, preferring to remain independent and open up as yet uncultivated land. In this situation, the only way to lay claim to the labour of another is by exercising extra-economic force. This was how Nieboer explained slavery in tribal societies (Nieboer 1910). Willemina Kloosterboer applied this theory more widely, using it to understand various forms of unfree labour in colonized and other pre-industrial societies (Kloosterboer 1954). As long as waste land was relatively widely available on Java, it would not be possible to find wage labour for the Western-led agro-industry on a voluntary basis. This situation would gradually change in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as land replaced labour as a scarce factor of production. As the population increased, so did the pressure on agrarian resources. In addition, the steady advance of commercialization in the rural economy helped create a landless proletariat from which large agribusinesses could fulfil their requirements for a casual or permanent workforce. I shall return to this turnaround in Chapter VIII. Without wishing to deny that there was a shift in the balance between land and labour along these lines, I would like to point out that a landless underclass had formed within Java's countryside much earlier. The existence of this underclass had already been identified in early-colonial reports, including in the 1822 colonization report, drawn up for Commissioner-General Van der Capellen by Muntinghe.

> The Javanese kings, having insufficient funds always to pay their subjects for the services they required of them, found it equally impossible to demand that this unpaid labour be carried out by the poorest members of their populations, who owned no land at all, and possessed no other

> means of subsistence than the work of their own hands. Demanding that this numerous class among their subjects should provide them with compulsory unpaid labour would amount to condemning them to hunger and destitution. The kings were therefore forced to restrict the obligation to provide unpaid labour to the owners of the *Sawa* fields. A share in the yields from the *Sawa* field was their payment for the compulsory labour, in place of money. (republished in Ottow 1937: 268-9)

A landless class of pre-capitalist origin remained confined in the peasant economy in a relationship of unfree labour, a position from which it was only very gradually liberated in the later colonial era. As we shall see the labour mobilized *en masse* for cultivation and corvee services was largely performed by land-poor and landless peasants. The switch from labour being in short supply and therefore kept in bondage to a situation in which labour became abundantly available because the free access to land was blocked, marked the transition that took place in the course of the nineteenth century. This also meant that the need for coercion by the government gradually declined, as the conditions required for a free labour market were now in place. But this change was not only brought about by the free play of social forces determined by a combination of demographic growth and economic expansion. It was by no means a coincidence that the abolition of the cultivation system and of the Priangan system coincided with the announcement of the Agrarian Act in 1870. The Act regulated the lease of uncultivated land on Java, which the colonial state declared its property. In the late colonial era, the government exchanged total control over labour with control over land. This was the unbridled violation of the rights of the native population that Muntinghe had feared.

The system of land rent revenue, so much was crystal clear, would never yield what the managers of the colonial enterprise had promised themselves: a steadily growing surplus that could be transferred to the state budget in the metropolis. What was under the land rent scheme called the lease of farmland by the state to the peasants might perhaps be sufficient to cover the costs of governance and administration but there was no substantial surplus to be expected from the imposed taxation. That could only be achieved by increasing the volume of export crops even further. The global economy was developing at a steady pace and it was important that the price of colonial goods sourced from Java was certainly no higher, and preferably lower, than that of the Netherlands' competitors active in the business of imperialism. That economic principle ensured that production on the basis of unfree labour remained an essential requirement. Only by

paying the peasants the lowest possible price for the use of their land and labour was it possible to make a profit for the mother country. It was this understanding that persuaded Johannes van den Bosch to reject the model of private estate-based production using free labour that had been suggested to him. His mission to the West Indies on behalf of the King to reorganize the way these colonies were managed strengthened his conviction that it was only possible to achieve a minimum production price by saving as much as possible on the costs of native labour. This reasoning lay at the basis of the cultivation system that Van den Bosch devised and put into practice. So who was Van den Bosch, how did his plans take shape and what were his modes of operation?

Spreading benevolence at home and on Java

Johannes van den Bosch started his promising career in 1799 as an officer in the Engineering Corps in the East Indies. During his first ten-year stay in the colony, he bought a large estate close to Batavia, which he ran efficiently and profitably. He was forced to leave Java in 1810 after a disagreement with Governor-General Daendels. On his return to the metropolis, he reflected on the knowledge and experience he had gained in colonial practice in the East Indies. This resulted in a two-part treatise, dedicated to the King, which was published in 1817-18, *Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika, in derzelver toestand en aangelegenheid voor dit Rijk, wijsgeerig, staathuishoudkundig en geographisch beschouwd, met bijvoeging der noodige tabellen en eenen atlas nieuwe kaarten* [Dutch possessions in Asia, America and Africa, considered in their state and relevance for this Kingdom, from a philosophical, political and geographical perspective, with the required tables and an atlas with new maps]. He most likely also made his way to the upper echelons of the freemason movement in The Hague and that connection to the *haute bourgeoisie* helped him to become a confidant of the royal family. His interest in political economy led Van den Bosch to an in-depth study of metropolitan poverty, which had become even more pressing as a result of the economic crisis that still held the country in its grasp. Despite his steady rise to higher ranks in the military, he left active service to devote himself to solving the misery in which the lower classes were confined. In 1818 he established the Benevolent Society with the support of a select group of influential figures, including Frederik, the King's second son. The economic distress, deteriorating into pauperism, in which the urban poor in particular lived, was alleviated by relief provided by the

church or the municipality. This charity was an acceptable remedy for those unfit to work, such as the chronically ill, the disabled or the elderly, but did not offer much relief for those who were unable to meet their basic needs because there was no work. The Benevolent Society aimed to rehabilitate them by facilitating their re-engagement in the labour process. The designer of the plan arranged for the unemployed to be moved to the east of the country, where they could make themselves useful opening up waste land for self-cultivation. The initiative led to the establishment of three agricultural colonies, named after the King's children, where the deserving poor were housed. To facilitate the transition from hopeless urban pauperism to tilling unproductive land, these victims of poverty required not only some instruction in the basics of agricultural work but also strict supervision to teach them how to live properly through gainful employment. Exposed to this drilling in good behaviour gave the experiment a strong disciplinary character, despite the recruitment being on a voluntary basis. This was not the case for another class of destitutes, including vagrants, beggars, alcoholics and other misfits, who were considered too lazy to work. The local authorities in the west of the Netherlands were given the opportunity to rid themselves of these undesirables by having them locked up in two institutions, which were also opened in the east of the country. Teaching moral and civic behaviour to this class of undeserving poor of course called for a much stronger dose of re-education. Being committed to the institutions itself was already a form of punishment, but for these wayward people, the ultimate aim was to change their mentality so that the imposed discipline would be replaced by self-discipline and self-provision. Delinquents were eligible for discharge when they had sufficiently demonstrated that they had regained their virtuousness. Rehabilitation was the condition for their return to mainstream society, but if they relapsed into their old habits, they would be confined again. The passage below shows how strict the regime was to which these involuntary inmates were subordinated.

> The new institutions were large (100 to 145 meters long), square buildings with a central courtyard. At Veenhuizen, a central wall ran the length of each wing, dividing the inner courtyard for undisciplined 'beggars' from the 125 individual apartments for 'colonist families', which ringed the outer facade. The inner courtyard was accessible by only two gates, one for men and one for women, who were kept separate by a fence that divided the courtyard in half. The living arrangements in the inner courtyard consisted of fourteen single-sex dormitories, each sleeping eighty people. Undisciplined, criminalized pauper families were split up and placed

> in these dormitories at their induction. Supervisors' apartments were placed between the dormitories, so that the overseers could observe residents' behavior without themselves being seen. Couples who could demonstrate that they were married and who were wellbehaved were allowed to settle in the family apartments in the outer ring of the building. To ensure that those in the outer ring did not take advantage of their relative independence to drink or leave the premises, as had the 'free' colonists at Frederiksoord, a moat, guarded by sentries, was dug around the building (Schrauwers 2001: 311).

Van den Bosch was assured of royal protection in implementing his plan for combating poverty in the metropolis by agrarian colonization and the King now began to make use of his services for overseas purposes as well. Almost ten years after their first meeting, Willem I felt that this confidant was the man he needed as his consultant for colonial affairs. Van den Bosch went on a mission to the West Indies to come up with proposals to improve the unsatisfactory financial and administrative state of affairs in those colonies. Satisfied with the report that Van den Bosch submitted in 1828, the King appointed him Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies later that same year. He was given the task of making the colony profitable for the mother country. The intention was clear, but how was Van den Bosch to achieve his pledge to generate a colonial surplus to stimulate growth and prosperity in the metropolis? This was a question on which many advisers continued to hold conflicting opinions. Van den Bosch was given the benefit of the doubt to put his ideas into practice.[23]

The cultivation system that the new Governor-General started to introduce immediately on his arrival in 1830 was not a blueprint, a ready-made design with detailed instructions on how to act. What later merited the name 'system' only emerged piecemeal. Its main characteristics are clear from its basic principles. The point of departure was the cultivation and delivery of agrarian products by the peasant population for sale on the world market at a competitive price. To generate the profit required to stimulate the metropolitan economy, these commodities had to be acquired at the lowest possible cost. That was the only way to compete with suppliers

23 In addition to his own writings, I made use of published biographies for information on the way in which Van den Bosch devoted himself to eradicating poverty in the metropolis and to the introduction of the cultivation system in the colony. See J.J. Westendorp Boerma, *Johannes van den Bosch als sociaal hervormer; de Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*. Groningen 1927 and, by the same author, *Een geestdriftig Nederlander: Johannes van den Bosch*. Amsterdam 1950.

from elsewhere in the world, such as the slave-based plantation-industry in the Caribbean. Cheap labour had always been the cornerstone of the old colonial regime and this continued under the new policy. Apart from paying the peasant-producers as little as possible, it was also important to keep administrative overhead – especially the costs of ensuring that the peasants complied with the obligations imposed on them – to a minimum. This could be achieved by preserving the mode of operation applied during the VOC era, which, according to Van den Bosch, was simply a continuation of what came before. In the Priangan, this was the trust that the peasants placed in their local chiefs, while elsewhere on Java it was the village system that was alleged to be founded on 'traditional' institutions. These two principles – the heavy burden imposed on the peasantry and low expenditure on surveillance – were intended to change the colony into a source of income for the metropolis. Force was an undeniable component of this new policy. It was said to be necessary because the colonized population had simple needs and therefore lacked any zeal to work. Was the coercion inherent in the cultivation system not a problem for its founding father? Van den Bosch put forward a variety of arguments to counteract this opinion. First of all, forced labour was the continuation of customs from the pre-colonial past. Secondly, the forced cultivation and delivery of crops only took up a modest proportion of the time and assets that the producers needed to fulfil their own basic needs. Lastly, Van den Bosch claimed that the obligations imposed on the peasants would lead to a real increase in their incomes. Indeed, their standard of living would rise even more than they could expect if they were allowed to freely dispose of their labour as they wished. Of course, left to themselves they did not want to exert themselves and seek redemption from indolence. From this perspective, the compulsion had a beneficial effect because it put an end to the underutilized labour of the peasantry, an outcome which would first and foremost benefit the people themselves. It was basically the same argument with which Van den Bosch had justified the detainment of urban poor in the Netherlands as the best way to achieve their rehabilitation to citizenship.

The next chapter elaborates on the way in which the cultivation system was implemented. Before that, however, this final section will examine what happened to Van den Bosch himself during and after the introduction of the system of which he was the architect. The new policy made a somewhat hesitant and unsteady start in its early years. These initially disappointing results did not, however, persuade Willem I to abandon his trust in his favourite. On the contrary, Van den Bosch was given more and more authority, until he eventually had *carte blanche* to act as he saw fit.

The Governor-General succeeded in demoting the Council for the Indies, whose members had shared in governance of the colony, to the status of a purely advisory body. On being appointed, Van den Bosch had agreed to take on the position only on condition that he would not hold it for more than three years. It was ultimately a little longer – though not much – and before departing in 1834 he took the trouble of giving his nominated successor, Jean Chrétien Baud, thorough instruction in the ins and outs of the job. Back in the metropolis, the King immediately appointed Van den Bosch Minister for the Colonies and, in that position, he continued to monitor the enforcement and expansion of his policy, which had now taken on all the characteristics of a full-scale system. The success that the founding father had in mind had now been fully achieved. The best evidence of this was the steady increase in the colonial surplus, which the metropolis not only gratefully accepted, but more or less took for granted. The role of the colony as a source of profit was not up for discussion. Van den Bosch himself had returned home a rich man. His wealth had not been gained from his governmental services but from the income from his enormous estate, Pondok Gedeh. This area, known as the gateway to the Priangan, covered an area of 22,000 hectares and included 80 villages, whose inhabitants grew and delivered crops as prescribed by the cultivation system. He had bought the estate from Nicolaus Engelhard in 1832 and the advantageous deal that the Governor-General agreed with this old hand showed that the *kongsi* at the top of the colonial administration had remained intact after the changing of the colonial guard. The King would not have begrudged his protégé this fortune, as he himself had reaped much greater profits from the services Van Den Bosch had performed on his monarch's behalf. For his part, Van den Bosch remained loyal to his patron, including in later years when parliament increasingly criticized the King for being headstrong, and especially for refusing to reveal the financial accounts of the colony. The dispute reached breaking point in 1840 when Willem stubbornly refused to render account for the colonial loans he said that he needed as his privy. To see it debated in parliament was, in his perception, an inadmissible infringement of the rights of the Crown. Van den Bosch sided with his royal patron, allegedly against his better judgment, and resigned when the King's wish was overruled by a parliamentary majority. As a reward for his counsellor's unswerving loyalty, the King immediately appointed him Minister of State and elevated him to a higher rank in the nobility, with the title of Count. With hindsight, too, Van den Bosch continued to defend the principles and effects of the cultivation system with undiminished fervour.

Before examining the enormous rise in production on Java for sale on the world market more closely, I would first like to make a few additional comments on the main lines of what would go down in history as the policy of surplus. The discussion that surrounded its launch demonstrated a fundamental conflict between ideas and interests. The ideas that Van den Bosch propagated were grand, dogmatic and fashionable, while the underlying interests were crude, pragmatic and driven by pure self-interest. In an ideological sense there was a deep belief in the potential for development that lay dormant in every human being and could be given free rein by an enlightened government, but politically, the main concern was the need to discipline a peasant population, subject to a system of coercion that they despised and hated, to increase the cultivation of crops for export. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the colonial administration began to be associated, for the first time but indelibly, with a rather suspect objective. Illustrative of the fundamental inequality between the colonizing rulers and those they colonized was the assertiveness with which Willem van Hogendorp, as the closest colleague of Du Bus de Gisignies, spoke of the inferiority of the Javanese race. He outlined his views in a letter to his family in the Netherlands. White supremacy, he claimed, was based not only on the possession of weapons but also on superiority of character and reason, which the people of Java accepted subordinately and with docility (Hogendorp 1913: 78).

The principles on which this foreign domination was based ran completely against the tide of new political and social opinions that had emerged in Europe in the wake of the French revolution and which were gradually gaining ground there. In the colony the received wisdom took on the characteristics of an ideology, systematically justifying and legitimizing oppression. In the decades that followed, this ideology increasingly acquired the character of a fundamental contradiction between white and black. Illustrative of this school of thought was a memorandum from 1850 with which Jean Chrétien Baud ended his career as Minister for the Colonies. He not only described this contradiction in an absolute sense, as purity that could not tolerate any form of contamination, but also gave the impression that the dominated race endorsed white superiority and had become convinced of its own inferiority.

> History teaches us that any contact between the white race and the dark-skinned peoples has resulted in the subjugation of the latter by the former. This experience has convinced the black races that the white race is a higher form of being, and that it is the destiny of both that the one

> should dominate over the other. That right of domination is however, in the strictest sense, considered to be solely a characteristic of the pure white race, so that, while a black man will bow submissively to a white man, he is reluctant to obey a man of mixed blood.[24]

With this statement, the man who for many years held the highest colonial office expressed the undiluted racist prejudice that underlay policy in the colony. Could indeed the steady rise in coffee production be seen as a yardstick for the degree to which the subordination which the colonial authorities invoked to justify the exploitation of the Javanese peasants had become internalized?

24 The reference to Baud's memorandum is included in the *Algemeen Overzigt van de staatkundige gesteldheid van Nederlandsch Indië over 1852* (pp. 314-5) in which G.G.A.J. Duymaer van Twist reported in 1855 on the governance and policy pursued. NA, Ministry of the Colonies. 1850-1900, inv.no. 5870, Exh. 9 June 1855, no. 303 secret.

VI The coffee regime under the cultivation system

A new surge in the colonial tribute

The argument that forced labour was unavoidable to keep the cost price at the lowest possible level had to be played down in the public presentation of the government's policy to generate a surplus in the colony. The minister in charge of colonial affairs stated with regret that the Javanese people did not possess the work ethic required to extract all the potential benefits offered by the fertility of their island. This observation led him to declare in 1830 that the starting point for government on Java was 'to guide the people to devote their labour to that purpose that was most in accordance with the interests of the mother country' (Van Deventer II, 1866: 497). The reverse argument, that the price to be paid for prioritizing these interests was clearly to the disadvantage of the colonized population, was however much more difficult to justify. The imminent abolition of slavery – although introduced with much delay by the Dutch government[25] – suggested that the plea to maintain the regime of unfree labour on Java would not necessarily be greeted abroad with unanimous approval. This explains the government's concise summary of its intentions in the colony, 'to obtain the best possible product of the best quality and at the lowest price, without putting the population under pressure' (quoted in Van Gorkom 1880b: 177-8). To ensure that the suffix to this sentence did not remain in the realm of fiction, the government decided to present its policy of demanding that the people of Java engage in productive work as encouraging them to an effort that would benefit both them and their country. Since these people were not willing to grow crops for export of their own accord, because of their childlike, non-economic mentality, there was nothing else for it than to impose the necessary discipline upon them. As long as they showed no signs of having internalized the need to work, coercion would remain necessary to lead them towards progress.

When explaining the foundations of the cultivation system he envisaged, Van den Bosch referred to forced cultivation and delivery of commercial crops as the main pillars of the regime pursued formerly by the VOC. In

25 After stepping down as Minister for the Colonies in 1848, Baud accepted the chairmanship of the commission set up in 1853 to prepare for the abolition of slavery.

his view, a return to that policy was in line with the principle of raising tribute, to which the peasantry had already been accustomed in the remote past. The people of the Priangan Regencies were living proof that there was no cause to doubt that orders from above would be carried out loyally. After all, the traditional arrangement had been preserved in this region, with the help of the native chiefs. So why not introduce the same regime on the rest of the island? Not everyone was, however, convinced that this precedent would work as Van den Bosch suggested. In an early protest against the new policy Cornelis Theodorus Elout stepped down as Minister for the Colonies. Jean Chrétien Baud, at the time Director of Colonial Affairs and later on his successor as Governor-General and Minister for the Colonies, critically responded that breaking with the *ancien régime* outside the Priangan Regencies had brought about changes that would be difficult to reverse. The blueprint revealed by Van den Bosch did not include the return of the landed gentry elsewhere on Java to a leading role in the cultivation and collection of the crops. Certainly, the Sundanese people had proved to possess an exceptional propensity for obedience, but was it realistic to expect the peasants in other regions of the island to do what was required of them, without the native chiefs having to intervene directly and at close quarters? It was arguable whether the greater docility ascribed to the people of the highlands of West Java could be attributed to a difference in mentality or to a form of governance that had intentionally left the structure of native authority in the region intact. Engelhard's statement, that the Priangan regents kept the peasants under control with a whole range of means that were not only invisible to the European officials but far beyond their reach, comes to mind in this context. The cultivation system was introduced at a time when the colonial apparatus was still far removed from the workfloor. In other words, there was no guarantee that the orders issued would have the desired effect. The solution found for this problem – outside the Priangan – was to designate the village council made up by local headmen as the link between the government and the people and to reward its members, at the expense of the majority of inhabitants, with tax-free land holdings. This village structure, which Raffles 'discovered' and identified as the traditional basis of the peasant order, became the focal point for the allocation and distribution of the burden of growing crops for export imposed on the people under the new tribute system. In that sense, colonial exploitation in the Priangan Regencies – where the village system that was prevalent elsewhere did not exist – was organized differently than it would be under the cultivation system. My account will continue to focus on the introduction and impact of the system in the highlands of West Java.

Coffee and more

The range of products that fell under the system of forced cultivation and delivery varied according to region. This was partly due to variation in administrative practices and partly to agronomic considerations. On the northern coastal plain of Java, to the east of Cirebon, sugarcane soon took up a substantial proportion of the farmland and the labour capacity of the population. In the upland areas of Central and East Java, the same applied to coffee. I will discuss the similarities and differences between growing coffee in these regions and its continued cultivation in the Priangan later. However, I would first like to examine attempts to prescribe the planting of other crops with promising prospects on the world market. These efforts to promote diversification came rather unexpectedly, since in many districts the order to plant coffee had been accompanied by a pledge that the producers would be exempt from other cultivation obligations.

The designation of the Priangan highlands as the centre of indigo cultivation coincided with the start of the cultivation system. At first, this crop was reintroduced – the VOC had insisted on its being produced here at the end of the seventeenth and in the first half of the eighteenth centuries – on a limited scale. Doubts about its profitability and a lack of effective monitoring to ensure the required quality had led to a decline in interest in its production, but it had never disappeared from the Priangan completely. At the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC management had declared itself to be critical of claims that the highlands were not suitable for growing cotton and indigo (De Haan III, 1912: 817). Reports of Pieter Engelhard's inspection tours of the Priangan in the early nineteenth century show that, during his tenure as Commissioner, he had issued orders to plant a number of fields with indigo by way of experiment. There is also, however, no lack of reports showing that reintroduction of the crop would be strongly resisted. The peasants did grow indigo, but only to dye textiles they had woven at home for their own use. In his annual report for 1800, the inspector for Cianjur warned that peasants were so afraid of having to grow indigo that they would flee at the first signs of preparations being made (*ibid.*: 823). Van den Bosch nevertheless decided to give indigo priority even over coffee. According to official reports, indigo was to be planted on land that was not or was no longer suitable for growing coffee. As provisional inspector of the new crop, G.E. Tesseire, was ordered to conduct an investigation and his findings, based on a tour of the regencies of Cianjur, Bandung, Sumedang and Limbangan in April 1830, led to the Priangan being designated as a production area for a substantial share of the

envisaged volume of indigo. Cirebon was also identified as a region where production could be successfully introduced. To encourage the managers in charge of cultivation and processing to make a greater effort, they were assured of a tenth part of the revenue from the sale of the crop. Government officials and native chiefs received this 'cultivation commission' on top of their regular salaries or other emoluments (Reinsma 1980). To process the indigo into dye, Tesseire requested and was given permission to build 19 factories spread throughout the Priangan Regencies. The factories were built close to the fields (Van Deventer II, 1866: 148-54).

The peasants may have had a great aversion to growing coffee, but its replacement by the new crop that had to be processed in a factory before delivery imposed an even greater burden on their already meagre means of subsistence. In reaction to reports of massive land flight the authorities ordained that the peasants who stayed behind would have to bear the full weight of the new obligations. The assumption that it took some time for the colonial authorities to become aware of the disastrous consequences of this policy is incorrect. The Resident of Cirebon indicated as early as December 1830 that not everything was going according to plan. The revolt he referred to was not unusual in this traditional centre of unrest, but a hastily set up commission of inquiry concluded that it was not inconceivable that the introduction of indigo had aroused much resistance (Van Deventer II, 1866: 195-6). Van den Bosch had tried to mollify him and, a month later, insisted that growing indigo was very lucrative for the producers, as they were paid well for their labour and were exempted from all corvee services. Among themselves and behind closed doors, the policy-makers could be more candid in exchanging views about the unwillingness of the peasants to do what they were told. A member of the Council of the Indies noted in a memorandum that the resolute assurance of the Resident of Cirebon that the peasants planted indigo of their own free will was incorrect and that it had been touch and go whether the whole residency would be up in arms. He also warned that paying cultivation commission to the officials and chiefs charged with supervising the cultivation and processing of indigo encouraged abuse. Council member Pieter Merkus, at this stage a declared opponent of the Governor-General, took a more principled approach to the problem. He called the assumption that the Javanese peasants were aware that they had entered into a contractual agreement with the government misplaced (*ibid.*: 221). In a subsequent memorandum, he warned against going any further with the use of force to acquire labour and products from the peasants. He had little confidence in the report by the Resident of Cirebon, since it was his policy that had led to the unrest surrounding

the introduction of indigo to the region. Reading between the lines of its report, it is clear that the commission of inquiry had ordered the Resident to exercise caution and advised him not to advocate a situation in which 'the chiefs felt bound to physically confine those unwilling to work' (*ibid.*: 295). In July 1831, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies suggested, choosing his words carefully, that growing indigo was too demanding on the peasants, but Van den Bosch stood his ground. Criticism now came from lower down in the colonial apparatus, and focused on the conflict of interest between indigo and coffee. By 1834, the initial optimism had been replaced by doubts about the wisdom of continuing the cultivation of the new crop in the Priangan Regencies. Shortly after Van den Bosch had left the colony his successor, Jean Chrétien Baud, went on a tour of inspection which led him to express his satisfaction with the situation in the residency and the willingness of the people to do as they were ordered. The new Governor-General spoke less favourably about the cultivation of indigo. He was concerned that it was being grown at the expense of coffee, which was much more important commercially. A year later, cultivation of this new crop – introduced with such high expectations – was abandoned. A report by Inspector for Cultivation Louis Vitalis on the situation in East Priangan was very influential in reversing the previously so optimistic outlook. The Inspector wrote that the people of Sukapura and parts of Sumedang lived in small, widely dispersed settlements. These peasants were still nomadic and depended for their livelihoods on growing food on dry ground, which produced very little. They had no time to grow indigo and what they earned from it was not enough to live on. In addition, they were forced to travel long distances over difficult terrain. It was not uncommon for them to take two weeks to reach the production site allocated to them, while they were at great risk from attack by rhinoceroses, tigers and other wild animals on the way. In the three factories that Vitalis visited during his first inspection in April 1835, several thousand peasants had died of hunger. He described graphically his encounters with walking skeletons that dragged themselves from place to place, many of whom expired from the rigours of their ordeal. Some were so exhausted that they died as they ate the food that was issued to them as an advance on their first meagre wage.[26] A second report by Vitalis on the situation in Sumedang was equally alarming.[27] Lack of food had led to an unimaginably high level of mortality.

26 Report on the state of indigo cultivation and factories in the Priangan Regencies residency by L. Vitalis, 14 April 1835. NA, Baud collection, 461.

27 Idem, 29 June 1835. NA, Baud collection, 461.

Vitalis recommended closing all indigo factories in the Priangan Regencies except one, abandoning cultivation of this crop and giving the fields back to the peasants to grow paddy. These recommendations were put into practice almost immediately.

As with the cultivation system in general, abolishing the forced cultivation of indigo proved more difficult than its introduction. That had everything to do with the assumption at the top of the colonial bureaucracy that labour could be requisitioned without restraint and for the lowest possible payment – if it was paid for at all – from a pool of workers who were required to be conveniently available at all times. Later criticisms of the problems surrounding the cultivation of indigo were much sharper with the benefit of hindsight, but a climate had developed at the time in which reports voicing any form of criticism were dismissed as biased and unfounded. This dismissive response found its way back to the metropolis and critics, who clearly knew what they were talking about, were obliged to express their complaints anonymously. A publication from 1835, for example, expressed this criticism in no uncertain terms, denouncing the negative impacts of indigo cultivation in the Priangan Regencies (Blik op het bestuur 1835: 54). The complaint was backed up with facts that only insiders were privy to. Indignation among the main policy-makers about these ignominious allegations ran high and led to a ban on civil servants, whether still in active service or not, making official documents public. The leaking of information had to be stopped to ensure that critical discussion on the new regime would be restricted to only a small circle of those directly involved.

What is striking about the introduction of the cultivation system is that the line of command in the colonial enterprise did not acknowledge any countervailing opinion and that its stated objective had to be achieved at any cost, irrespective of whether the burden on the peasantry was too great. Although food production was extended rapidly in large parts of the Javanese countryside, agricultural activity was primarily focused on growing cash crops for export. Besides the fact that the scaling up of production was accompanied by the exercise of force, the government also had an inadequate understanding of the structure of the native economy and the resources on which the peasants relied for their survival. Managers and the actual cultivators had insufficient agronomic knowledge and no effort was made to investigate whether efficient production was possible with the existing techniques and tools. A small number of experimental agricultural stations were set up but were unable to bring about any great change due to the lack of a clear agenda. The policy-makers showed hardly any interest,

if at all, in what the forced delivery of these crops meant to the mass of the peasants. Attempts to introduce improvements in the shortcomings that emerged in practice were more incidental than planned. This haphazard approach explained the tendency to improvise and the ease with which objectives were simply replaced with others if that proved potentially more expedient. An important step towards improving these aspects was the appointment of a Director of Cultivation at the end of 1831 to supervise the production and expansion of the prescribed crops. This meant that, in addition to the specific policy pursued in the separate districts, there was now an inspectorate with the task of inspecting, coordinating and reporting on cultivation activities across the whole island. A small batch of young men were taken on as probationers and provided with agricultural training. An official was given the job of compiling a statistical record for each district containing reports and other documents from the government archives, and including maps and sketches.

The government focused its attention on the cultivation of sugarcane, coffee and indigo. In a memorandum in mid-1830, Van den Bosch indicated that other crops should also be encouraged, including cotton, silk and tea. Tobacco, pepper, cinnamon, cochenille (used for dyeing) and cinchona were later added to the list. Most of these products did not get past the experimental stage, or not until much later, and interest in them seemed to be inspired more by a sudden and short-term fascination than a sensible weighing up of the pros and cons. Of course, the introduction of coffee more than a century earlier had been no less unplanned: its unexpected import from distant regions, random planting first in areas that proved less suitable for it to grow, placing officials in charge with no knowledge at all of the crop, and uncertainty as to how it would sell on the world market. In my view, it is the persistence of this ineptitude that is so striking. What had been introduced informally, almost as a hobby, at the start of the eighteenth century continued to be approached in the same way in an age in which rural Java had been, in the words of a later commentator, turned into one huge labour camp. This may have been an exaggeration, but it did not change the fact that the expertise with which the colonial policy-makers had initiated the cultivation system was anything but impressive. It seemed to lack the essential features of a system: cautious preparation, careful implementation and close monitoring of the impact. Vitalis related how he repeatedly had to suggest that a failed crop should no longer be grown. During an inspection in 1837, he discovered 2,000 coffee planters who had been working in a garden for five years. Some of them had to cover a distance of 28 miles just to get there. In this period, their efforts had produced only

a total of three *pikul* of coffee (Vitalis 1851a: 3). The 'production method' basically entailed setting ambitious goals and then taking resolute but impetuous measures to pursue them. If this produced disappointing results, but it was too difficult or impossible to adjust the manner of working for practical reasons that could not be overcome at that time, the experiment was abandoned, the books were closed and the costs incurred were written off. Attention would then shift to another crop, as demand for colonial commodities was growing as never before. This development was closely linked to increasing integration in the world system and the search for new commercial crops which, as the consequence of a limited understanding of market forces, were hitherto unknown or had at least until then remained out of sight. Some of these were plants that grew only in the wild and which were now being considered for cultivation. In 1830, the Dutch consuls in Egypt, Peru and Chile received requests to supply cinchona seeds. Egypt and Chile both replied that it would be difficult to comply with this request and that costs would be high due to the inaccessibility of the areas where the seeds grew. Behind the apparent success of the main products on which the cultivation system focused – primarily sugar and coffee – there is a long history of failures and disappointments. The reports on these experiments are obscure and do not express fully the extent to which the sometimes extremely high costs were usually charged on exclusively to the native producers. And who should care, as the experiments required little investment, while the required labour could be requisitioned at no cost at all?

More and more coffee

The Priangan region retained the function it had been designated a century earlier: as an epithet for the forced cultivation and delivery of coffee. How did the region fare under the cultivation system? Not well, at first. Its founder had in the early 1830s decided to give priority to indigo in the firm conviction that it would be much more profitable, as the price of coffee had fallen on the world market. The Resident of the Priangan Regencies, who had opposed what he considered to be the over-hasty introduction of indigo as it imposed too great a burden on the peasants and would not be profitable for the government, was relieved of all involvement in the new crop by the Governor-General and even threatened with dismissal when he continued to object. On the other hand, there are reports that the native chiefs found it easier to motivate the peasants to grow coffee so that they would not be mobilized for the feared cultivation of indigo.

When the price of coffee rapidly recovered, the Sundanese hill people were forced to enormously increase the number of trees they planted without a corresponding reduction in the quota set for indigo. This only started to fall after 1833, when colonial policy-makers had finally become aware of the disastrous effects of growing the crop. The population of the Priangan had paid a high price for this failed experiment.

With indigo out of the picture, coffee retained its place at the top of the list of prescribed crops. In the Priangan Regencies, it would remain the primary product for many years. Encouraged by the favourable prospects of rising consumption in the Atlantic world, the process of expanding coffee cultivation to other parts of Java that had already been set in motion now speeded up. Van den Bosch ordered that the stock of trees must increase to 40 million a year, which could only be achieved by planting trees on the highlands in the west, centre and east of the island. In 1832, after Merkus had tendered his resignation as a member of the Council of the Indies to avoid escalation of a difference of opinion with the Governor-General,[28] he was given the task of drawing up a regulation on growing and delivering coffee under the cultivation system. Within two months, Merkus had a draft ready, which started with the question of how the obstinate reluctance of the peasants to growing coffee could be overcome. In his view, this aversion was not caused by the heavy workload. Once the trees had been planted, maintaining them took little time and effort. As we shall see later, the veracity of this claim is utterly misplaced. However, past attempts to encourage coffee production without using force had failed. Nothing had come of the formal freedom to grow coffee granted to the peasants outside the Priangan in 1817. According to Merkus, everyone knew that the government had made coffee production compulsory again because of the peasants' unwillingness to grow it voluntarily. This repugnance was partly attributed to the excessively low price they were paid for their efforts, but was also seen as a consequence of them lacking the incentive to work. Merkus argued that, if abolishing the obligation to grow coffee led to the gardens being neglected and destroyed, preserving forced cultivation was a logical response, given the interests at stake for the metropolis. But, he said, this should occur on condition that the peasants were paid a fair price for growing coffee against their will and that the government should claim no more than a fifth of the yield. Making them supply the coffee exclusively to

28 Van den Bosch rejected Merkus' request apparently because he preferred to have his opponent close by and under his authority than at a distance where he would be more difficult to control.

the government protected the innocent Javanese peasants from the harmful practices of private traders, mainly Chinese and Arabs. But it was not only non-Javanese Asians who were excluded from the region. A ban had been in place since 1823 on all persons not in the colonial service to visit or stay in inland Java without the express permission of the Governor-General (Van Gorkom 1880b: 171). Establishing a monopoly on purchasing coffee production certainly guaranteed the government greater profits, but the measure was allegedly taken mainly to serve the interests of the peasants.

To overcome the Javanese aversion to work, the planters had to be assured a sufficient reward for their efforts. Van den Bosch could see the merits of this argument and agreed to a number of Merkus' recommendations. He was even in favour of paying the peasants at least 20 per cent of the value of the product for their labour. But the Governor-General would not go as far as to pay them a fixed proportion of the average market price. He reminded his adviser that the peasants were simply overgrown children with limited powers of reason. A continually changing income would only confuse them. Goedhart noted correctly that, from this perspective, coffee planters were seen as wage labourers employed by the government, who were paid for the work they did (Goedhart 1948: 34). The final decision in 1833 displayed some willingness to pay the peasants a reasonable amount. The government would index the payments by adding a bonus of 40 per cent per weight unit if the market price fell below average, and 30 per cent if it rose above it. The Governor-General had shown himself to be an excellent businessman. He initially estimated earning a surplus five million guilders on government products in 1833, but he first adjusted this to eight million, then expressed the hope that he might be able to push it up further to twelve million in the long term, and eventually succeeded in transferring goods worth sixteen million guilders a year to the Netherlands (Van Deventer II, 1866: 528-9 and 542-3). To fulfil this promise, he needed to expand the monopoly, at first restricted to cultivation and delivery, to selling the procured products on the home market. The Dutch Trading Company had taken it upon itself to organize transport of the export crops to the metropolis and to sell them by public auction on arrival.

Van den Bosch anticipated that coffee production would grow from the 300,000 *pikul* of the previous years to 500,000 *pikul* in the near future. Did the new regulation mean that there would be one standard regime for the whole of Java? The situation on the rest of the island now more closely resembled that in the Priangan Regencies: forced cultivation and compulsory delivery. Yet substantial differences remained. Under the instruction that came into force in 1832, the coffee planters elsewhere on Java had to plant

and maintain 500 fruit-bearing trees a year rather than 1,000, the number imposed on the people of the Sundanese highlands since the late eighteenth century. A second difference was that, in the long established centre of coffee production, the tribute was collected by the native chiefs while on the rest of the island it was the village council that mediated between government and people. Thirdly, the coffee peasants in the Priangan were not paid the same amount as the inhabitants of other regions on Java. Although this fluctuated as the market price rose and fell, the difference was always more than double the 'wage' with which the Sundanese peasants were fobbed off.

In the course of time, the cultivation of coffee had been relocated from the low-lying land to the foothills and then to even higher ground. But there had also been another shift in terms of location: when coffee had first been introduced in the early eighteenth century, the trees had been planted close to the settlements, around the peasants' homesteads, in the strips of land separating their fields, and on plots not used to grow food. As this land became scarce, they had to start clearing the forest a little further away but still reasonably accessible. They would leave the taller trees, cutting away the undergrowth and planting coffee in the newly opened up terrain. In his instruction to increase production, Van den Bosch had initially based his calculations on the land available to grow 'hedgerow' (*pagger*) and 'forest' coffee. The expansion in the years that followed primarily took the form of specially laid out 'gardens'.

Table 6.1 Types of forced coffee cultivation

Year	Plantations	Forest	Hedgerow
1836	25%	28%	47%
1845	46%	14%	40%
1850s	60%	10%	30%

Source: Clarence-Smith 1994: 253

The work in the gardens – from the preparation of the ground, planting and maintaining the trees, to picking the berries – was strongly regimented. Supervising the labourers was also much less problematic than in the widely dispersed and much smaller plots on which the hedge and forest coffee was grown. The discipline characteristic of both plant and planter in the gardens perfectly matched the command structure inherent in the cultivation system. The priority given to this large-scale mode of production was

expressed in the statement by Director of Cultivation Burchard Joan Elias in 1836 that 'garden coffee' produced the highest yield (Van Baardewijk 1986: 7).

A rather megalomaniac blueprint drawn up by the colonial management at the end of 1833 planned to increase coffee production to 100 million *pikul*, which would require more than 263 million trees. This target, specified for each residency separately, was based on the idea that a berry-bearing coffee tree produced almost a third of a *pikul* of beans. The calculation not only vastly overestimated productivity per plant, it also failed to specify whether the required labour could be requisitioned and where from. How did this target affect the Priangan Regencies? The enormous area needed to plant the new trees was no longer available close to the peasant settlements in the lower-lying parts of the region. The path towards expansion led upward, requiring the cultivation of the zone between 1,000 and 1,500 metres high, which was still thickly forested and uninhabited. This, together with the uneven, mountainous terrain, made cultivation a difficult prospect, but there was ample ground here unused and suitable for growing coffee. To open up these virgin lands, labour was brought in from far and wide in large numbers to clear the primal forest and prepare the gardens for planting the trees. The work was arduous and was made even more difficult by the unfavourable climate at these altitudes. Cold and rain, which started here before the end of the morning, and lack of food and shelter affected the workers' health which, together with the wild animals that lived in the forests and the mountains, contributed to the high mortality rate. In his account of a tour of the Priangan Regencies, Philippus Pieter Roorda van Eysinga noted that, in a period of two months, 33 people in Bandung had been attacked and savaged by tigers (1830: 210). In his inspection report from 1835, Vitalis wrote that, during tours of the coffee gardens, officials were preceded by *angklong* and tambourines to scare the animals off.

Often, land to lay the new gardens was chosen with insufficient care. Preparing mountainsides for cultivation bore the risk that the soil was not deep enough and, after having been turned over with a *pacul*, it would easily be washed away by heavy rain. All the work in the gardens was done carelessly and with great haste. The saplings were planted too close to each other, so that as they grew the branches became entwined and the space between them, required after three to four years to pick the berries, disappeared. The planting itself was also performed with insufficient care. Shoots ripped from old coffee trees were stuck roughly into the ground. Because the plants were damaged, they were guaranteed to bear inferior fruit, but this was not discovered until later, if at all. The maintenance of the trees during the growing cycle was equally inexpert. Mostly, they

received such little care that neatly laid out gardens soon turned into wild forests. The gardens were divided up into sections, which were separated by main avenues and side paths intended to make a neat and tidy impression during inspections. If the ground was hoed too eagerly, the fertile topsoil would be removed and trees would lose their vitality. Such shortcomings, individually and in combination, explained why many gardens were already 'depleted' after six or seven years, having delivered no more than two or, at the most, three harvests. But, again, there was no lack of uncultivated land and it was just as easy to find labour to prepare it. It was a form of plantation management that came close to slash and burn agriculture. Not only was the forest cleared with total disregard, but the people mobilized *en masse* to lay out the new gardens were not paid a single cent for their efforts. Because they assumed that the coffee trees were naturally no longer productive after only a few harvests, colonial officials had no difficulty at all in writing off gardens scarcely six or seven years after they had been laid out. Later research in Ceylon, for example, showed that even on less fertile ground, coffee plantations could remain in production for up to 20 years, and without the enormous fluctuations in yield that so typified the history of coffee production in the Priangan Regencies. The forced cultivation of this crop resulted in a boundless waste of both land and labour.

When growing coffee was still concentrated in and around the villages, the peasants were accustomed to growing paddy or other crops between the young coffee trees. Until the beans could be picked after three or four years, they could at least derive some benefit from the time that they had spent in planting the trees and for which they had received no payment whatsoever. Their work in the gardens, which were often at great distances from their villages, made the possibility of growing food even more crucial. They could not go back and forth each day and they could not take enough food with them for the duration of their stay. But the strict regime enforced in the plantations did not permit them to grow any crops in between the coffee trees. Their only option was to eat roots that they found in the forest around the gardens or to try and clear a plot where they could sow a little rice.

> When these people lay out coffee gardens, it is blessing for them if they are permitted to plant paddy or rice in the gardens, as they will frequently get a better harvest from them than from the Gagas that they have laid out for this purpose. This has often been forbidden by some official or other who is either unfamiliar with the lot of the poor Javanese or does not care about it; there are incidences of paddy that has already been planted having to be uprooted (De Wilde 1829: 42-3).

The argument for not allowing food crops to be grown between the coffee trees, which was formalized in an instruction in 1829, was that it would affect the vitality of the trees. In his annual report for 1833, the Resident noted with satisfaction that neither his officials nor the local chiefs were lacking in enthusiasm for the work entrusted to them. If they were not motivated by a sense of duty, their efforts were driven by the promise of the cultivation commission they received. On the downside, the prevailing lack of paddy meant that it was very difficult to get the peasants to go to the coffee gardens to work and to make sure they had enough food for themselves for the duration of their stay.

Approaching the workfloor

Between 1833 and 1840, coffee cultivation expanded frenetically. The payment of high cultivation commissions made an important contribution to the eagerness with which the managers – both European officials and native chiefs – devoted themselves to their main task (Enklaar 1871: 131; Croockewit 1866: 314-5). The Resident's report for 1833 noted that the population had increased to 554,771, distributed among 92,127 households, 5,835 *kampungs* and 84 districts. The average of a little less than 100 inhabitants per settlement (less than 20 households) was not evenly spread over the whole region. By contrast to the somewhat larger clusters in the more densely populated areas, Sukapura had a much lower average of fewer than 50 inhabitants per village. The fall in coffee production from more than 100,000 *pikul* in 1825 to a third of that volume in 1831 was rectified by planting a total of no less than 330 million extra trees in the period up to 1840. A memorandum sent by the Assistant Resident for Bandung W.A. Nagel to his superior in 1834 is informative.[29] It was the first time that the situation in a regency had been described from so close up and showed that the European officials were approaching the workfloor. Nagel spoke from long experience. He had worked in Cianjur from 1820 to 1827, when he was appointed Assistant Resident for Bandung. On his arrival there he found coffee production in a bad state of repair. The gardens had been carelessly laid out, the wrong kind of soil had been chosen, the trees had been planted much too close together and the work was not divided evenly. In addition, there were no records of how things had been done in the past. He achieved substantial improvements in all of

29 Memorandum from W.A. Nagel to the Resident of the Priangan Regencies, Bandung, 20 August 1834. NA, Baud collection, 442.

these areas, but that included writing off a million trees that appeared in the tallies submitted by the local chiefs but had never existed. That meant scrapping a very sizeable percentage of the total stock, which amounted to less than six million trees in 1827. Under his charge, their number rose to almost 24 million trees in 1834, a sixfold increase in only seven years. This was subdivided as follows: garden coffee – 6,719,150 trees; forest coffee – 6,485,250 trees; *kampung* or hedgerow coffee – 10,456,951; total 23,661,351 trees.

For such a large and densely populated regency, Nagel felt that Bandung produced very little coffee. The quantity of hedgerow and forest coffee had risen after 1831, as the peasants had a clear preference for planting trees close to their homes, and in 1833, hedgerow coffee still topped the list. However, more promising were the large-scale coffee gardens at a higher altitude that the Assistant Resident had started laying out in 1828 and which were now beginning to bear fruit. In the years that followed, these plantations would account for the lion's share of the coffee produced. Nagel had great difficulty in mobilizing sufficient labour for the mountain gardens. He had appointed local chiefs to the position of *kometir* (commissioner) and made them responsible for arranging the mobilization and employment of planters in the *kampungs* in his area. The work gangs (*t'rup*) were led by *petingi*.

> The plantation was divided into plots, each with a pole stating the number of the *kampong*, the number of trees and the year they were planted, so that the inspectors could see at a glance if the planters were following orders correctly. (Nagel 1834)

The Assistant Resident specified the authority and obligations of the *petingi* and *komitir* in detail in an instruction issued in 1832. The district chief gave him a list of the *kampungs* under his charge, how many planters each had to supply, and the location of the lands under cultivation. It was his job to visit all the sites and do whatever was necessary to produce the coffee. His records, which the village priest would help him with if necessary, would be sent to the district head, who was supposed to pass them on to the regent. These statistics would show, again at a glance, the state of coffee production from year to year. The implication was of a system of surveillance that could not fail. The planters who were set to work in gangs came from different *kampungs* and worked separately from each other under their own foreman. The pickets bearing the names of their *kampung* showed how they were divided into sections. The plantations were large-scale workplaces for many hundreds of men and women, who would stay there for weeks on end during the harvest time which was the peak season. At nights, they sheltered in the drying sheds

that Nagel had had built for the berries and which could each accommodate 300 to 400 people. Cart-makers were located close to the gardens to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to transport the harvest. Nagel noted that in the year of his report, 650 new *pedatis* (carts) had been made, at no cost at all to the government. During the busy seasons, district and lower chiefs stayed in these establishments to ensure that production and transport went off as planned. Building all accommodation also fell under the corvee services the planters had to perform, for which they received no payment at all.

The sharp rise in coffee production required not only more peasant labour but also more managers. In the Priangan, the corps of civil servants remained limited to a handful of European officials. Du Bus de Gisignies had drawn up an instruction for the coffee *controleurs* in the Priangan Regencies in 1829 (De Roo de la Faille 1895: 176), but they were few in number and remained at a distance, not concerning themselves at all with the daily business of growing coffee. These tasks were primarily the responsibility of the lower chiefs, and management at this level took place as Assistant Resident Nagel had outlined in his 1834 report. Alongside the line of governance that ran vertically from the regent down to the district head and branched off through the *camat*, his deputy, and other officials charged with specific administrative tasks, there was another line of management with, at its top, a chief *kometir* for the coffee who operated from the headquarters of the regency. He was in contact with the European *controleur*, who told him how many trees had to be planted and accompanied him in seeking out suitable land. They also conducted inspections together to remain up to date on the progress of the work. At district level, responsibility for coffee production lay with a *kometir* who received orders from his superior and passed them on to the *petingi*. They were responsible for putting together and mobilizing the *t'rup,* the gangs into which the *cacahs*, the households eligible for compulsory coffee service, were organized. A *t'rup* could contain 30 to 50 and up to 100 *cacah.* Right at the bottom of the management column were the *mandur*, the foremen who supervised the work of planting, maintenance and picking in the gardens. The gangs they were in charge of contained members from different *kampungs*.

The Assistant Resident had improved the infrastructure by widening the stretch of the Great Trunk road running through his area of command. The roads used to transport the harvest were also improved, so that the carts took much less time to carry their loads to the warehouses. Lastly, he had smaller roads built in many locations. All this work fell into the category of corvee services for which the labourers were not paid a single cent. He had given orders for a few people in each district to be designated to carry out small road repairs to the *Grote Postweg*. Major repairs required the periodic

The Great Trunk Road at Puncak (1875). Buffalo teams stood by to help carts on the steep sections.

Source: F. de Haan – Priangan, vl. 1, p. 485

mobilization of a large number of conscripted labourers. As far as the native chiefs were concerned, he was able to prevent or eradicate many abuses by keeping a close eye on them and, if necessary, replacing them. By classifying the *kampungs* and gangs in the districts by number and registering the number of planters or *cacahs* afresh, the Assistant Resident had discovered that the population of his jurisdiction was much greater than had been assumed. The number of inhabitants – 73,000 in 1826 according to the numbers submitted by the chiefs – had now risen to 178,000. The cause of this mass underreporting in registration was the attempt by the chiefs to exempt their clientele from the obligation to grow and deliver coffee. In short, Nagel looked back with satisfaction at his many achievements in the past eight years and expressed the hope that his superior would endorse this assessment. The Resident was indeed full of praise for his assistant's industriousness and expertise, but Nagel's long career came to a premature end when he was murdered in 1845 (De Waal 1866: 369). Colonial sources maintained a steadfast silence concerning this remarkable incident, with

the exception of a short announcement that Resident Jan Baptist Cleerens had been relieved of his post. As a further expression of administrative displeasure, the regent of Bandung was also dismissed on suspicion of being involved in the crime. No further details were forthcoming.

Shortly before his untimely death, Nagel had drawn up another statistical report showing the changes that had taken place in the regency since his appointment as Assistant Resident in Bandung in 1827. With 17 years of service in this position, preceded by seven years in a lower-ranking post in Cianjur, he must have been an exceptional expert on the state of affairs in the Priangan within the small corps of European officials. Comparison with the detailed report that he had brought out ten years earlier showed that the population of his jurisdiction had increased to 201,485, distributed among 39,824 households in 811 *kampungs* and 1,683 hamlets (*cantilan*). Only a tenth of all households were exempt from all cultivation services. The greatest majority – 28,173 households, or nearly three-quarters of the total – were involved in growing coffee. They were divided into 105 gangs and worked in 186 gardens. They tended 30,600,000 trees, 22 million of which were fruit-bearing. On this basis, each household was responsible for 1,066 trees. Production had risen to 88,359 *pikul* in 1844, a fivefold increase over a period of 30 years. The table below, based on data specified in Nagel's records, shows how this increase developed. It was characterized by large fluctuations, while comparison with the figures for the Priangan as a whole show that the share of the regency of Bandung had increased from around two-fifths to more than half. The Assistant Resident himself would have benefited substantially from this enormous rise in production. The cultivation commission must have made him a wealthy man and his annual dividend was probably the reason he never left Bandung to take up a higher-ranking post elsewhere.

Table 6.2 Rise in coffee production in the regency of Bandung, 1813-44

Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul
1813	18,891	1821	26,525	1829	25,562	1837	65,977
1814	17,586	1822	25,109	1830	22,084	1838	54,155
1815	20,416	1823	24,781	1831	17,723	1839	113,595
1816	18,132	1824	23,050	1832	22,328	1840	59,427
1817	22,212	1825	22,138	1833	33,290	1841	49,583
1818	19,993	1826	21,293	1834	74,428	1842	130,049
1819	21,011	1827	30,448	1835	46,260	1843	92,413
1820	18,568	1828	23,139	1836	76,278	1844	88,359

Source: *Preanger Statistiek*, in archive of Western manuscripts, KITLV

Table 6.3 Distribution of coffee trees in the Priangan Regencies, 1835

Regency	Number of trees		Total
	Fruit-bearing	*Saplings*	
Cianjur	3,617,709	9,399,297	13,017,006
Bandung	3,179,500	12,762,658	15,942,158
Sumedang	1,728,011	8,243,166	9,971,177
Limbangan	1,437,360	4,528,629	5,965,989
Sukapura	—	375,000	375,000
Priangan Reg.	9,962,580	35,308,750	45,271,330

Source: Van Beusechem 1835

The table clearly shows the greater effort that accompanied the introduction of the cultivation system. The missing figure for Sukapura is undoubtedly related to fact that, in the early years of the system, priority was given in this regency in particular to growing and processing indigo. Although the forced planting of this crop had been a complete failure, it had also been pursued frenetically and inevitably led to the destruction of millions of coffee trees.

The Resident of the Priangan Regencies repeatedly urged that the purchase price of coffee – which had remained at two and a half cents a pound – be raised, but to no avail. He was supported in his argument by Director of Cultivation Jan Isaac van Sevenhoven, who declared that, while en route from Bandung to Sumedang during an inspection tour in 1833, Van den Bosch had pledged to pay more if production rose above his target of 65,000 *pikul*. This target had been achieved and the total stock of 42,184,720 trees showed that the population had not failed to make the effort required of them. By 1834, the harvest had doubled and the number of trees per household had risen to well above 1,000. Anyone familiar with the terrain must have concluded that the poverty-stricken peasants were paid a pittance for their heavy labour, receiving less than five cents a day for work that took up 225 days a year. Van Sevenhoven's request was rejected out of hand, but he persisted, writing early in 1835:

> I imagined how the coffee planters had to stay in miserable huts made of leaves repeatedly, for days and nights, in these high mountains, poorly clad and simply fed, in this inhospitable and always damp climate, where the rain pours down incessantly, stiff with cold, having to survive these piteous times far removed from their villages and households – This is no romanticized portrayal, the product of an overactive imagination; I can solemnly assure you, this is a true description of the state in which

> the large majority of these planters have to live. And then think of the drying, cleaning and transport of the coffee, as the small warehouses are at some poles distant from the gardens or villages; and you can then ask yourself; should it not be seen from another viewpoint, so that I, completely convinced of the truth of the matter, exclaim: *Is that any reward for so much labour!* (Van Deventer II, 1866: 726-7)[30]

The Director of Cultivation, also a member of the Council of the Indies, was called to order for revealing the pledge made by Van den Bosch, not publicly but in the company of a small group of high-ranking officials. It was unpardonable that he had addressed the now retired Governor-General in such uncivil terms. Besides reprimanding Van Sevenhoven, new acting Governor-General Baud added that granting the request submitted by him and the Resident of the Priangan Regencies would reduce the surplus. His words revealed the true merchant spirit of the colonial enterprise: 'to pay fl. 7.50 voluntarily for something that can be acquired for fl. 2.92 is ill-advised from a financial perspective' (Van Deventer II, 1866: 625).

What impact did the cultivation system have on coffee production in the Priangan Regencies? After Dutch rule was restored in 1815, this main area of production gradually lost its advantage over other parts of Java. Total production had been pushed up to 400,000 *pikul* by 1827, but the Sunda highlands accounted for only 122,000 *pikul* of this, less than a third. The relative significance of the Priangan Regencies declined even further in years after 1830, but that was due to substantial expansion of production elsewhere rather than an absolute decline in this region, which had been growing coffee for more than a century. The Priangan was now no longer dominant but retained a leading role in the cultivation of coffee. In 1833-34, it was the regency with the largest number of newly planted trees on Java: 9,771,510, of a total of 39,586,205. The explosive growth throughout Java continued until 1840 and resulted in a tripling of production between 1830 (288,742 *pikul*) and 1839 (905,200 *pikul*). The increase in total stock from 50 million in 1828 to 330 million in 1840 shows that the growing number of trees was not reflected in a proportional increase in the total weight of beans produced. This led Van Gorkom to conclude that yield declined as production increased (1880a: 80). Nevertheless, the burden on labour been massively intensified.

30 Memorandum of 22 December containing the reply by His Excellency the Governor-General on the increase in the price of coffee in the Priangan Regencies. NA, Van den Bosch collection, 604.

The happiness of the innocent

As in the past, the number of trees remained the main yardstick for the state of coffee cultivation and what is striking is the apparent exactness of the numbers recorded throughout the years: down to the nearest tree, suggesting a degree of control of the production process that extended right down to the workfloor. The counts were, however, a grotesque distortion of a reality that lay far beyond the reach and the vision of the reporting officials, who exaggerated the numbers to show how diligent they were in performing their duties. The young trees only bore fruit after three or four years, by which time a new reporter would often have replaced the old one. If the yield fell far short of expectations, he could always claim that the trees were of inferior quality or had been planted in bad soil, or that the berries had not ripened because of adverse weather conditions (too wet or too dry). But millions of trees only existed on paper and had to be written off because the predecessor's records were inaccurate. Van Gorkom (1880b: 186) wrote disparagingly that coffee production may have been pushed up to unprecedented volumes, but that the officials responsible for it sorely lacked the knowledge required to do their jobs properly, a situation that did not change after the introduction of the cultivation system.

The Resident of the Priangan Regencies reported with satisfaction in his annual reports on the progressive recovery of coffee production. The commission paid to the European staff had encouraged them to ensure that the recovery was consolidated, and was one reason for the excellent result in 1834, when the harvest was more than double that of the previous year. This rising trend continued as a consequence of the enormous expansion in the number of new trees planted in the recent years. The expansion of cultivation to southern districts was facilitated by the opening of a coffee warehouse in Pelabuhan Ratu on Wijnkoopsbaai. The Resident did note that it was more and more difficult to find sufficient people willing to go to the coffee and indigo gardens far away from their habitat. Many peasants fled to evade paying the compulsory tribute. The information that accompanied the Resident's reports showed only a slight increase in the European staff involved in the administrative work relating to compulsory cultivation in the Priangan. The Resident now had a secretary, a clerk, three Assistant Residents, four coffee *controleurs*, four warehouse masters and a small number of officials for other crops. Although coffee production was expected to stabilize at the level of 150,000 to 200,000 *pikul* a year, the Resident warned cautiously in his prognosis for 1835 that the government should be prepared for a slight fall in production. Adjustment after

adjustment followed, by tens of thousands of *pikul* at a time, and the final estimate of a little less than 100,000 *pikul* proved still too high. The harvest had fallen again to half of the previous year. But this only encouraged the government to plant even more trees: 11,981,06 in the 1835-36 season. In the light of this persistent effort it is not so much the sporadic increase in production in the course of time that demands our attention but the fact that it was interrupted by a drastic fall, followed by a new peak. For decades, cultivation of this primary export crop would be characterized by strong fluctuations. Nevertheless, the tone of official reports in this period continued to be optimistic, resolutely suggesting that the prospects for the future were good and remained bright.

Official reports during the period of the cultivation system were strongly ideological, radiating a blend of self-righteousness and self-confidence. The self-righteousness was inspired by the conviction that an economic process had been set in motion that produced excellent results, and not only for the Dutch treasury, which benefited from the high profits that remained after operational costs had been deducted, but also for the colonized population whose production and productivity had increased considerably. The self-confidence came from having penetrated deeply into an alien landscape to pursue a policy based on improved knowledge of the land and its inhabitants. The collection of all kinds of information was evidence of this desire to know more. As far as the natural environment was concerned, this intelligence related to geographical distances and accessibility, fluctuations in temperature and weather conditions, the changing of the seasons, the height of mountains, the sources and courses of rivers, and flora and fauna. Specifying all these observations in reports, records and statistics removed the uncomfortable feeling of working in terrain that was as yet uncharted where things happened to which outsiders were unaccustomed. Gradually, however, the foreign rulers gained a greater understanding of the land they had colonized. Registering data on inhabitants and settlements was necessary to enable them to be governed and helped legitimize colonial domination. After all, the new rulers upheld the pretence that their instructions built on the situation that had existed before their arrival and, in that sense, the colonial order had to be understood as in keeping with practices that had been in place much longer. This link between present and past made it necessary to construe a process of historical change based more on continuity than on a break with the past.

A good example of the progressive compulsion to check and record source material was a series of monographs describing the statistics and history of districts. In 1832 J.M. van Beusechem, acting president of the Council of

Justice, had been given the task of making a start on a statistical description of the Dutch East Indies, using data in the government archives. After producing a report on Cirebon in 1835, he came out with a follow-up on the Priangan Regencies a year later.[31] The region was still thinly populated, but the population had doubled to 507,000 between 1796 and 1832. The count was actually too low, as the population had grown by several tens of thousands in the preceding five years. This was not so much the result of natural growth as of the fact that the people were no longer afraid that the government would impose a higher and higher tribute. The prejudice against censuses was now a thing of the past, as it was no longer necessary to claim that there were fewer households than there actually were. Van Beusechem expressed his confidence that the next time, the report would reflect the true figures. He believed that the government deserved to be admired for not eroding the authority of the local chiefs in the Priangan Regencies. He admitted that the lords of the land much enjoyed displaying their pomp and circumstance and undeniably lived far beyond their means, but they did preserve law and order. Where the introduction of the land rent system had led to unrest and rebellion in other residencies – by which he meant the Java War, which had raged from 1825 to 1830 – in the Priangan, under its well-behaved regents, public order had been maintained without a single garrison having to be stationed in the region. As to the devotion of the people, there should be no doubt whatsoever. Even when rabble-rousers from elsewhere had tried to encourage the people to resist the colonial authority – like the rebels who had penetrated the regency of Sumedang from Cirebon in 1830 – their advance failed thanks to the resolute response of the chiefs. With these expressions of praise, Van Beusechem indicated that the Priangan system had been the right choice and that to continue with it would be in the interests of all and sundry.

The regents could count on the obedience of their subjects, compelled them to perform a wide variety of services without payment, and showed a remarkable predilection for public displays of prestige. Their aloof presence demonstrated that they were elevated far above the mass of the population but kept a very close eye on what was going on. Van Beusechem added that the government reserved the right of succession to these positions of regional power. It was the Resident who decided who would take over when the position of regent fell vacant and, after 1809, the same started to apply to district chiefs. The native administration was responsible for simple

31 Serie Statistiek en geschiedenis van de regentschappen op Java, no. 3 Priangan Regencies. J.M. van Beusechem 1836. NA, Ministry for the Colonies, 3046.

police tasks, but more serious offences were subject to the higher colonial courts. The regent was assisted by a *patih*, his second in command and the executive arm of the native government apparatus. The *patih* lived and had his office in the main *negorij*, close to the regent but outside the three walls encircling the latter's court. The chiefs' sons often spent some years training as clerks at the office of the residency, so as to learn about the practice of governance. Their training would include writing simple reports, keeping records and conducting correspondence. They used the Malay language, but wrote in Latin characters. In addition, there were Islamic clerics, who were also divided into different ranks. The elite were *imam* or *haji*, from whom the high priest (*panghulu*) was chosen and who also sat on the regency council and in courts of law. The lower clergy acted as village priests and doubled up as schoolteachers. Their elementary knowledge of reading and writing – gained during several years of study in *pesantren*, institutions that fell outside the control of the government and gave religious instruction – explained why they were also called upon to perform a wide range of non-religious duties, such as administering cow-pox vaccinations and organizing the cultivation schedule of food crops. The residency report for 1846 specified a total of 2,563 members of the clergy, dividing them into higher and lower ranks. The best known priestly school (*pesantren*) were in Limbangan and Sumedang. The first, run by Kiahi Nawawi, had 100 pupils while the second, headed by Kiahi Abdul Jalil, had 300 pupils. The government school set up by Resident Van der Capellen for the sons of local chiefs in Cianjur in the early 1820s had reopened after being closed to save costs, but now had only 20 pupils. The regent paid for the writing materials and the native teacher's meagre salary and allowed the school to use a room in his *dalem*. The teaching focused on the skills considered useful for relations with local chiefs while 'avoiding anything that could give the education a religious import'.

To ensure that tradesmen did not purchase food crops at a much too low price – due to the peasants' eagerness to have a little money in their pockets – the government had issued a ban on free market enterprise. This measure had ensured that the people of the Priangan, innocent as they were in matters of trade and monetary transactions, did not suffer unnecessary losses.

> The Government of the Indies was thus always intent on leaving these simple people in their innocence and protecting them against the deceitful actions of profiteers. The happiness of a people is relative and where they can enjoy peace and tranquillity, and generally suffer no

> lack, they can be considered to live in a certain degree of happiness. (Van Beusechem 1836: 72-3)

The benevolent situation in which the people of the Priangan found themselves was, according to this official chronicler, partly because they had an ample supply of food, resulting from the expansion of paddy cultivation. In Cianjur and Bandung especially, irrigation projects had turned many swamps into fertile fields. The increase in coffee production may have remained below expectations but, thanks to a better division of labour across the population, a much higher yield would be possible in the near future. As yet, however, there was no sign of a steady linear increase. Based on the production figures for 1833 and 1854, it seems justifiable to conclude that there was indeed a sharp rise in production in the intervening period, from 336,000 to 1,065,100 *pikul* for Java as a whole. But by comparing two other years, it was equally possible to show that the yield had halved, rather than doubled, from 905,200 *pikul* in 1839 to 455,200 in 1849. The enormous fluctuations from year to year concealed the fact that, until about the middle 1840s, there had been a sharp increase in production but after that the volume, with extreme peaks and troughs, had remained virtually constant. This levelling out is striking, given that the population were driven to plant more and more trees. That also applied to the Priangan Regencies, whose share had now declined to less than a fifth of total production on Java. The pressure applied by the government was not restricted only to expanding the stock of trees; the work required to plant and maintain them, pick the berries and transport them to the warehouses meant a huge increase in the burden on the peasants. The colonial policy-makers had devised an ingenious solution to this problem in 1839: to impose the obligation to grow coffee not on the *cacah* – the composite peasant household comprising the landowner and the sharecroppers and farm servants dependent on him – but on the *somahan*, the co-habitation unit of man, wife and children.

Stagnation

The closer the exercise of colonial power came to the base of peasant society, the more sharply the shortcomings of the regime of forced cultivation, which had been decided upon in the early days of the eighteenth century, were revealed. The relocation of coffee production to the higher lands meant that the peasants continually had to shuttle back and forth between their homes and paddy fields in the valleys and the coffee gardens in the mountains.

The distance was too great to make the journey every day. Although it had been ordered in 1829 that trees should not be planted more than 12 poles distance from the villages, no one had ever paid heed to the instruction. As a consequence, the peasants were forced to travel long distances to the gardens, and had to continue to do so, as the trees lost their fertility only a few years after the first harvest. New plantations had to be laid out from scratch elsewhere, a phenomenon known as 'wandering gardens'. Fences were built around the gardens not only to keep wild animals out, but also – and no less importantly – to keep the peasants in, so that they could not escape their obligation to work. The only way in and out was closed at night and not opened again until the following morning. Garden *mandur* lived on the spot for the whole season and their surveillance helped improve the effectiveness with which the planters were confined to the gardens for as long as was necessary. The men in particular would be away from home for months at a time to open up new gardens, a necessary and frequent activity, given the constant need to relocate. For the harvest, the entire family was obliged to move to and stay at the plantations for up to two months, so that, in busy periods, they became true labour camps, which were deserted again after new trees had been planted or the harvest was over. This restless coming and going took place in the opposite direction in the villages. Such wasteful use of labour on a very large scale could have been avoided by allowing the planters to clear fields near the plantations to grow their own food. As already mentioned, however, the peasants were not permitted to do this, nor were they allowed to use vacated gardens to grow food as it was assumed that, after the trees had been thinned out or lopped back to their stumps, the gardens could be used to grow coffee again after a few years. The peasants therefore had no other choice than to continue their up-and-down mobility and, for good or bad, try to satisfy their own needs in the time left to them.

Delivering an increasing volume of harvested and dried beans now took less effort than in the past, thanks to the much improved transport capacity, the possibility of delivering the consignments to district warehouses, and the building of two shipping warehouses on the south coast at Pelabuan Ratu and Banjar for the coffee produced in Cianjur and Sukapura. New roads were laid throughout the area to accommodate the carts carrying the coffee. The following travelogue by Junghuhn paints a clear picture of the enormous caravans that passed back and forth along these tracks.

> As I approached the district of *Pawenang*, I discovered more and more signs of a rather monotonous activity. I saw many hundreds of two-wheeled

> *pedatis,* either in long rows, one behind the other, or clustered together in a circle alongside the road to form a sort of stronghold, in the middle of which the plump draught animals sat chewing the cud like elephant calves. Some of these *pedatis* were on the way to the *Karangsambung* warehouse to deliver their coffee, from the whole valley of *Garut*, etc., while others were on their way home. It was like looking at the following of an army, and I'm certain that half the population that was fit to work and the entire buffalo population was on the move. (Junghuhn 1845: 338-9)

Maintaining the roads was understandably as labour-intensive as building them. The hooves of the draught animals and the heavy, cumbersome carts with their great wooden wheels broke up the road surface. The unrelenting repair work required the continual mobilization of labour to perform corvee services. An official, the *kepala jalan*, was appointed in each district to make sure that enough people could be press-ganged into performing these 'public works'. He received his orders from the district chief and kept a record of when, where and to whom his pool of workers had to report. On the through roads, there were permanent maintenance gangs every 500 rods[32] to make small running repairs whenever necessary. These labourers doubled up as guards, ensuring the security of the traffic on the roads and providing transport assistance where necessary.

Daendels was the first Governor-General convinced of the necessity of improving the infrastructure. Once this was on the agenda, his successors applied themselves to constructing a wide variety of public works, including roads, bridges, official residencies, warehouses, checkpoints, stables, lodging houses, storehouses and guardhouses, etc. This resulted in a network of communications and facilities that enabled the transport of goods and persons to be expanded. And, as always, to meet this increased demand, the peasants were compelled to perform unpaid services, either by working as porters, loaders, escorts and messengers, or by providing their horses, buffaloes and carts free of charge. Who had to perform corvee services for the government and who was exempt, and how was this policy put into practice? These questions can be answered by referring to a memorandum drawn up in 1832 by Van Sevenhoven, the first Director of Cultivation.[33] The document contained many of the observations he had made during

32 One rod is equal to roughly 3.5 metres.

33 Memorandum on agriculture and the setting up of a coolie establishment, by J.I. van Sevenhoven, Director of Cultivation to the Residents, 8 September 1832. Ministry for the Colonies 1814-49, 3202.

his numerous inspection tours throughout Java. He had noticed that, at the *jangol* – the places where the labourers had to report for work every day – people were often left hanging around because there was no work for them. Rather than seeing the corvee services as work conducted by a pool of reserve labour, he envisaged an approach similar to what he had encountered in Pekalongan, where a coolie establishment had acted as a depot for regulating employment for several years. The coolies brought daily together at the establishment worked on the orders of the government but could also be hired out to private entrepreneurs for payment. Van Sevenhoven wanted to introduce these arrangements throughout Java to create a pool of reserve labour. The inhabitants of the main *negorij* were exempted from the obligation to provide corvee services. Van Sevenhoven believed that it would be politically unwise not to respect this exemption. Certain categories outside the main *negorij* were also exempt from corvee services, either because they held positions of local authority or because they paid to be relieved of the obligation. That meant that the burden was the heaviest on those who were the most vulnerable economically. What could be done to ensure that it was not the worst off who were the victims of this unequal division of obligations? Firstly, by using labour more efficiently and effectively, as was already the case in Pekalongan. Rather than requisitioning people arbitrarily for corvee services, which was excessively unequal, it would be better if the Residents were to calculate how many coolies they needed for the work that had hitherto been performed as corvee services. This demand could then be met by entering into an agreement with the owners of paddy fields obliged to provide labour services that would exempt them from paying the annual land rent tax in exchange for them fulfilling this obligation. Van Sevenhoven clarified this proposal by noting that the privileged class had a considerable influence on the people and that acting against their interests would be sure to have adverse repercussions. In exchange for a reduction in the land rent on the ownership of the land, *sawah* holders would have to surrender one labourer for a period of six months. Then followed a passage in which Van Sevenhoven showed that he was familiar with the *cacah,* the composite peasant household which was the primary social formation in rural Java.

> ... if the sawa holder has three men, who are dependent on him, each of them will have to work for two months. I hope that all the Residents will be sufficiently familiar with the Javanese household to know, that the sawa holders, are actually the descendants of the original settlers and heads of the families, which are dependent on them, and which

> they protect and to whose livelihood they contribute or are completely responsible for, and who will be obliged to assist them, primarily in the provision of corvee services and in cultivating fields, etc.; these hereditary owners and the families dependent on them have special names which are different in each Residency, but are known to each Regent and each chief, such as Tjatja, Sikap, Orang Bibit, Kredja, Patjol, Krawan, Kroman, etc., etc. (1832: 23-4)

Going into more detail, he explained that the mass of the population fell into two classes: the landowners, who were liable to pay taxes and provide services, and the rest, who tilled the formers' land. These dependents usually performed the services imposed on their masters. Van Sevenhoven's plan was essentially to continue this practice, but to make more effective use of the requisitioned labour by allowing them to be hired to third parties, so as to prevent idleness or waste. Although this proposal was received with interest at the highest level, the going practice remained as it was: the concentration of a labour reserve in the main *negorij* to perform all the services required by the government. This floating reserve assembled at the *balebandong,* the public grounds in front of the regent's residence, where the *patih* and the *jaksa* (the public prosecutor) had their offices. The requisitioned labour gathered in the main *negorij* and in the district headquarters to perform transport services on the government's orders, with or without their animals and carts. In 1857 in the Priangan Regencies, 500 riding horses and 2,853 *gladak* or draught horses were kept available just for the regular ferrying of persons and goods (De Haan IV, 1912: 661 and 929). According to another source, it was 500 riding horses and 5,000 servant's horses, for which 4,500 families had to be set aside and kept exempt from all other services (De Waal 1866: 566). For road construction and repair, the conscripted coolies probably reported directly to the workplace.

The mobilization of peasant labour in the service of the colonial economy did not stop the native chiefs from resolutely defending their right to have their subjects perform a wide range of services for them, too. These obligations, the scale and frequency of which were very difficult to catalogue, were a major source of irritation to European officials. For that reason, the authorities tried to declare the resolution of early 1836 restricting corvee services applicable in part to the Priangan by urging the regents to draw up and submit a description of these services (De Waal 1866: 362). The unexpressed hope was that this would have a restraining effect on the servitude of the peasants to their lords. After all, labour was needed on an increasing scale to grow and supply coffee and to perform the public

works associated with it. To achieve this objective, it was logical that all other claims, including those of the local gentry, should take second place. The question was how the size of the army of labourers could be expanded to increase the colonial tribute, without others being able to lay claim to their labour power.

It was with this aim in mind that the Resident – without incidentally being authorized to do so – initiated a radical intervention in the social order that prevailed in the Priangan Regencies in 1839. The *somahan* ruling abolished the *cacah* formation, which was the basis of the agrarian economy on Java. Van den Bosch had drawn attention to the existence of the *cacahs* in 1830, possibly on the basis of information that Nicolaus and Pieter Engelhard, or perhaps Lawick and De Wilde, had included in reports to their superiors and which had been preserved in the government archives. According to Van den Bosch, the larger landowners, or *sikap*, employed the landless to tend to their fields. In return for a share of the harvest, the labourers – known in the Priangan Regencies as *bujang* – performed the tributary services that their masters were obliged to provide as landowners. The multi-layered peasant households consisted of an average of 22 members or four nuclear families. In the introduction to a document outlining the principles of colonial taxation, the Governor-General described the household structure as follows.

> The Javanese are – according to traditional native institutions – divided into *tjatjas* or families, comprising a *head, and several households that are dependent on him.* The households often consist not only of blood relatives, but also often include labourers, who are subordinate to the head of the *tjatja*. (*Blik op het bestuur* 1835: 154)

The 1839 *somahan* ordinance meant giving up the principle that the tribute was imposed on the basis of landownership. Under the new provisions, all households were equally liable to a variety of levies. Instead of being imposed on the primary production formation of three or four families, the tax now applied to each of them individually. On paper this gave the cultivation services the character of a *levée en masse*. Landless households had long been mobilized to grow and supply coffee, but did this work on the orders of their masters, the heads of the *cacah*. The latter could no longer meet their obligations solely by sending their dependents; they now had to go and work in the coffee gardens themselves, along with their wives and children. Although this was not the primary intention the new rules, if strictly applied, would have brought about a radical change in the peasant

order. The direct mobilization of peasant labour meant that those who did not own their paddy fields but leased them as sharecroppers, were no longer completely under the control of the landowners. In this way, the regulation violated the golden rule of colonial policy, not to bring about any change in the unequal relations between the landowning and the landless classes at the base of society. Eroding the power and prestige of the better-off class ran against the principles of a policy aimed at not upsetting the balance of local power.

Crisis

Despite the intensified mobilization of labour, coffee production in the Priangan fell rather than rose. The Resident's report for 1846 spoke in sombre terms about the planting of new trees. A total of 562 fruit-bearing trees were required for one *pikul* of beans. Through lack of maintenance, new gardens were soon overgrown with grass (*alang*). The mobilized labourers simply failed to do what was required of them.

> The influence of the chiefs and the clergy is enough to lead and direct the people, who are soft-natured and amiable, and to subject them willingly to any task imposed upon them, even though this may require great sacrifice on their part. It cannot be said, however, that they are content, as the cultivating class, by nature slow and oppressed, who are thereby able to fulfil their basic needs with ease, display an apparent indifference to all special services required of them by the existing institutions and shows little interest in improving their lot through labour, industry or engaging in enterprises of benefit to themselves or in the general interest. (*Verslag Residentie Preanger Regentschappen* 1848: 87)

The coffee cultivation system had been notorious for many years for the ease with which the Priangan peasants could be mobilized to raise the colonial tribute without the claim on their labour having to meet even the minimum requirements of effectiveness and efficiency. 'Working aimlessly because they had to work' was already a well-entrenched malady as early as the VOC era, as Goedhart noted (1948: 58), and later generations of colonial officials continued this policy with undiminished fervour. Complaints about the lack of transparency and accuracy of the native chiefs could not hide the fact that the colonial accounts were of not much better quality. 'Fanciful' was how Van Gorkom described the official records drawn up by

the Resident's staff. Any errors discovered had to be corrected covertly so as to avoid any troublesome questions from higher up.

> The number of trees seems to change quickly and radically, and we have no reason to believe the accuracy of the count. Many years ago, a *controleur* in the Priangan discovered, through detailed investigation, that a garden which officially had 100,000 trees, actually contained no more than 10,000. The Resident felt embarrassed to issue an order for the immediate correction of the official records. Afraid of an unpleasant response from Batavia, he advised rectifying the error gradually. (1880b: 189)

Did the *somahan* ordinance have the desired effect? Most probably, the army of mobilized labour did increase considerably and the Resident did, at least on paper, succeed in finding the necessary hands to enable the area planted with coffee trees to be expanded. One regent had objected in vain to the new regime, claiming that it took no account of the traditional distinction between the classes. In reply, he was told that a more equitable distribution of the labour burden would improve the economic situation of the poor segment of the population (Van Rees 1867: 510). This suggested that the new measures would bring about a more equal distribution of wealth, while its real aim was of course to increase the burden of labour for everyone. De Waal also observed that the link between landownership and the duty of servitude had been broken and replaced by a system based on the nuclear household (1866: 368). Others, however, did not confirm the assertiveness of this claim. According to an anonymous source, a private landowner in the region who gave the impression of being up-to-date on the latest developments, the ordinance failed because it did not impose the obligation to servitude uniformly across the whole population. Other reports also showed that the heads of the *cacahs* were still in the first instance responsible for providing the labour required to grow coffee, but that in busy periods the workforce expanded by direct requisitioning all segments of the population. That also applied to the corvee services imposed by the government. The claim that, at the time of the cultivation system, the whole of Java was one large labour camp, is considered an exaggeration by Van Niel and others, but for the Priangan Regencies it would seem, at least in intention, not far from the truth. Van Gorkom's observation that the peasants made no distinction between unpaid corvee services and badly paid cultivation services is also relevant in this respect (1880b: 185). Both were founded on coercion, which would have been reason enough for the

peasants to evade them wherever they could or, as this became increasingly difficult, to perform them slothfully and with obvious dislike.

The conclusion displays a certain doubt whether the total mobilization of labour achieved the intended aim of increasing the level of production. This question must be answered in the negative. In the first place, distributing the burden more evenly across the population did not mean that it was lighter for the coffee planters individually. The continued expansion of the area under cultivation and the increase in the number of hands required to raise the colonial tribute did not lead to a corresponding rise in yield. Many trees died because they had been topped off or pruned without the required care. They were planted with similar lack of zeal. The available work reports paint a picture of planters who, often working in the pouring rain, would quickly dig a rough hole in the ground and stamp down the young plant with their *pacul* and their feet. The young plants were called *cambutan*, literally 'ripped out', and with good reason; the planters pulled the saplings roughly out of the nursery gardens and left them lying on the ground with broken roots for several days before planting them. The more it was forced up, the less productive the cultivation of coffee became, a trend expressed in the increasing number of trees required to produce a *pikul* of beans. The expansion of the labour base led to lower rather than higher yields. The long-standing hatred of the peasants for the yoke under which they laboured was fuelled by the steady fall in the price of coffee on the world market between 1842 and 1849, the brunt of which they had to bear (Goedhart 1948: 43). The decision to reduce the payments to the peasants was at variance with Van den Bosch's pledge not only to allow the producers to benefit from higher prices but, conversely, also to protect them from the risk of lower revenues. Although there was probably no change at all in the amount paid to the peasants in the Priangan, maintaining the basic price – already fixed for several decades at 3.15 guilders per *pikul* – signified a continuation of the injustice under which they had long suffered. Van Gorkom summarized this ruthless policy as follows:

> As always, the people had to foot the bill; the coffee cultivation system became their nemesis, their long history of suffering. ... In the Priangan Regencies, this was worse than elsewhere. (1880b: 186)

In 1854, the Directorate of Cultivation reported that there were 64,712,369 coffee trees in the Priangan Regencies; in 1855, that had risen to 69,168,370 and, a year later, yet again to 69,911,622. The survey also recorded the stock of garden trees, forest and *pagar* or *kampung* trees, together with precise

details of the average yield per tree, the number of planters, etc. Started in 1837, these records would be kept dutifully for the whole of Java for several decades. Everything had been done on far too grand a scale, concluded Goedhart with the wisdom of hindsight. Sometimes the whole population was mobilized to prepare land and lay out gardens, taking no account at all of how this would affect the work they needed to do to secure their livelihoods. Furthermore, trees were planted because it was *prentah* (ordered), but no one concerned themselves with making sure that the planting was successful (Goedhart 1948:52). This author reported that, in the second half of the 1840s, cultivation in regulated gardens on Java rose from 147 to 183 million trees, while the planting of hedge and forest coffee fell from 173 to 129 million trees. The results of later research showed that, after 1845, the system of garden coffee was expanded with unleashed fury, especially in the Priangan Regencies.

Table 6.4 Priangan coffee production 1847-64

Years	total no. *pikul*	average per year
1847-49	258,490	86,163
1850-52	467,501	155,833
1853-55	658,451	219,483
1856-58	499,480	166,493
1859-61	389,706	129,902
1862-64	287,520	95,840

Source: Colonial Report 1870-71

To make inspections easier, the widely dispersed gardens were merged to form enormous plantations. Sometimes there was no more than one in each district, so that many tens of *kampungs,* often located far away, had to provide the necessary labour. The mass planting of new trees in these years initially led to a sharp rise in production but it proved impossible to sustain. It proved too much for the workforce, as the figures for the period from 1847 to 1864 show.

Van Gorkom, who spent the whole of his long career in the coffee business, reported in 1866 that, of the 50 million trees recorded in the Priangan residency, four-fifths were fruit-bearing. Nevertheless, their yield was extremely low, and he explained why in his accompanying notes.

> If we take a walk through one of the most magnificent and expansive gardens in the coffee residency, the Priangan Regencies, we are amazed

> at the variety of trees that form the borderlines and which are laden down with fruit, but which surround a core that is the equivalent of a wilderness, that surrounds itself in darkness and permits itself as little air and light as possible, so that fructification of the trees must remain an illusion. There they lie, the splendid coffee forests, extending for many poles, and because of incomplete and insufficient maintenance, perhaps half are not productive. And yet rich forests have been sacrificed to plant these gardens, immeasurable forces have been employed, and are still employed, and hundreds and thousands of men, women and children – and the plantations as well – waste away there, because the division of labour is as fictitious as the direct, judicious and industrious inspection. (1866: 399)

The persistence of this stationary production, despite the intensified effort to expand the area of land under cultivation and mobilize more and more labour, eventually forced the government to acknowledge that it had no other choice than to introduce radical reforms. The report on the great coffee survey conducted in the 1860s (discussed in Chapter VII) spoke of 'the fatal system of planting coffee in regulated gardens' which was seen as the predominant cause of the crisis after 1845 (Colonial Report 1870-71: 2768). In 1856, to give him a greater insight into the nature of the problem and possible solutions, the Director of Cultivation ordered Resident Van der Wijck to conduct an investigation. The main issue he was to address was whether the burden of forced coffee cultivation had been increased to such a degree that it exceeded the capacities of the population in parts of the residency. Although Van der Wijck's report concluded that this was not the case, it was clear from reading between the lines that a turning point had been reached and that the area used to cultivate coffee would inevitably decline in the long term as much of the land had been depleted through persistent use. Another objection was the remote locations of the gardens. Not only were the plantations often as far as 20 poles from the villages but, with the latter in the valleys and most of the gardens at between 2,000 and 4,000 feet, the peasants also had to deal with considerable differences in altitude. Reassuringly, the Resident added that the peasants were used to this inconvenience and could not do without the income it generated, little as it was. The total number of coffee trees in the Priangan Regencies grew from 45,271,330 in 1835 to 69,911,622 in 1855. It was an ominous sign that this increase was not maintained, but declined again after this extensive effort. In 1866, the stock of trees had fallen to 39,660,814 and then rose again the following year to 48,945,945. These figures have to be taken for what they

are worth – very little – but there can be no doubt about the downward trend. During this period, there was also a shift from forest and *kampung* coffee to garden coffee. The predominance of the first two kinds in the early years of the cultivation system, as described in the discussion on the report by Assistant Resident Nagel, was completely reversed. Of the stock of 48,945,945 trees in 1867, 41,651,489 were planted in gardens, and were therefore generally a considerable distance from the peasants' villages.

Resident Van der Wijck managed to avoid being the harbinger of only bad news. The number of inhabitants had grown to 806,000. Based on the substantial increase in the number of paddy fields and new *kampungs,* the Resident made it clear that he did not share the often-heard opinion that the population suffered under the burden of the new system. He stated cheerfully that, with the exception of a few districts not blessed with riches by nature, abundance reigned throughout the residency. In fact, in his opinion, the inhabitants of the Priangan were much better off than their counterparts in other parts of Java (Report by Van der Wijck to the Director of Cultivation 1856: 3). The Resident referred to the high revenues from the sale of salt as proof of the prosperity of the inhabitants and praised the progress made in the recent decades. Of course, the great distance that the planters had to travel to the gardens made it difficult for households to maintain 1,000 trees and it was therefore advisable to reduce this to 800 or even 600-700 as an absolute maximum. In the thinly populated and still uncultivated southern part of the Sunda highlands, where nomadic agriculture was still practised, the *gaga* peasants lived far from the coffee gardens and could not be expected to tend more than 500 trees. Finally, given the very low revenues, Van der Wijck considered it advisable to abolish the cultivation of coffee in a small number of districts. However, he warned that this might cause peasants to desert from nearby areas, where forced cultivation was still in place. To illustrate the depletion of the coffee gardens in Cianjur, Van der Wijck pointed out that in 1834 a total of 5,250,000 trees in this regency had produced 46,712 *pikul*, while in 1855, 14,000,000 trees had yielded only 37,000 *pikul*. This meant that three times as many trees were needed to produce one *pikul* in the later year than in 1834. The Resident's anxiety exclusively focused on the sharp decline in productivity. It was a telling sign of the one-sided nature of his investigation that he completely failed to address the growing imbalance between the work involved in growing coffee and the payment the planters received.

A radical change in the organization of the work that was disadvantageous for the planters was the introduction of the West-Indian method of preparing the berries after picking. This work was subcontracted to

European businesses which, after 1848, had been given permission to set up mechanical hulling mills in a number of locations. This meant that the ripe berries, until then peeled and dried in the gardens, now had to be delivered to the hulling mills for further processing. The pickers continued to use the former drying sheds to sleep in at nights and to shelter from the rain during the day. The sheds, known as 'chicken runs' (Goedhart 1948: 68) were not at all suitable for these purposes. Carrying the freshly picked berries every day to the mills, which were mostly at some distance from the plantations, was a heavy and time-consuming job. The mills had insufficient capacity during busy periods, meaning that the carriers sometimes had to wait a long time to deliver the berries. The mill managers also used them for all kinds of coolie services. Other complaints were that the mill-owners did not pay the full amount for the berries they received or refused, rightly or wrongly, to accept unripe berries. To put a stop to the damaging and repressive impact of the mills, the Resident advised in his report returning to the old method of preparing the berries. His advice was taken up in the following years and the licences for the mills, which were processing 40 per cent of Priangan coffee production in 1854, were rescinded. As a concession, the pickers were given permission to take the harvested berries back to their villages for drying. Although this meant carrying the sacks with fresh berries, a heavy load, to their homes, it considerably reduced the amount of time the pickers had to spend at the plantations in accommodation that was inadequate in all respects (Van Heeckeren van Brandsenburg 1865).

Security patrols along the borders of the Priangan Regencies and on the roads could not prevent the smuggling of clandestinely acquired coffee. The Resident had to admit that the continuing low prices paid to the peasants contributed to their collusion in these illicit practices. He specified low payments and a lack of suitable land as the main problems, adding that there was little to be done about the second. In an attempt to solve the first problem, the cost price per *pikul* in the Priangan was finally raised in 1859, from 3.15 to 5 guilders, and then by 25 cents a year to 6 guilders in 1865. But the increase had little significance, as what the Sundanese peasants received remained way below the price that coffee planters were paid elsewhere on Java (40 guilders per *pikul* in 1866). Van Gorkom calculated that, in 1864, a total amount of 180,129.02 guilders had been paid to the Priangan producers for 31,328 *pikul*. Distributing this amount among more than 85,000 households required to take part in the forced cultivation of coffee meant a revenue of 2.11 guilders per household. This was the payment each household received for an average of 100 working days, including the labour of the wife and children. The pittance was completely out of

proportion with the effort involved. The producers of this commodity, which generated such high profits for the colonial rulers, were accorded absolutely no economic value. Van Gorkom concluded his calculations with an indignant exclamation.

> And yet the expansion continues, and yet the population is driven further and further every year to increase the statistical tallies! ... The cancer has to be sought in the system. This system is preposterous. (1866: 400)

Non-compliance

The claim on labour rose to unprecedented heights in the mid-nineteenth century. The question is, however, whether the colonial authorities in the Priangan also succeeded in their objective of distributing the obligation to work equally across the whole population. Only those incapable of working – the disabled, the elderly and very young children – continued to be exempt. Chiefs, the clergy and others of high status, such as those held in esteem for their pious behaviour, were also not called upon to supply their labour. Furthermore, not all those registered as obliged to work actually turned up in person. Sending a substitute was permitted and occurred on a wide scale, paid or not. But did this also apply in the Priangan Regencies, where the *somahan* ruling of 1839 had explicitly put a stop to the composite peasant household, which also contained sharecroppers and farm servants? Resident Van der Wijck suggested that imposing the obligation of servitude on all households meant that the *cacah* heads would lose their control over the land-poor segment of the population, which would irrevocably led to redistribution of landownership (Van Rees 1867: 510-1). In an essay published much later, De Roo de la Faille agreed with the Resident, concluding that there had been a process of levelling off between landowning and landless households. In his view, this process of homogenizing the peasantry of the Priangan had been set in motion as early as 1789, in Rolff's instruction, and consolidated half a century later in the household regulation. The process had broken the link between the *bumi-juragan* and his *numpang* dependants. It became impossible for the former to retain more farmland than he could tend to with his own immediate family and *bujang*, and he had to release the other household heads dependent on him. (See De Roo de la Faille 1941: 423-4.)

The results of a number of local surveys conducted by colonial officials in the 1850s contradicted this conclusion. Shortly after being appointed Assistant Resident in Sumedang, Kinder de Camarecq published a report containing detailed information on Sembir, a *kampung* not far from the main *negorij*. He had conducted a survey in 1856 by meeting villagers, without involving the regent. They told him that all forms of servitude were vested in land and were therefore concentrated in the *cacah*. The introduction of the *somahan* household system may have meant that the *numpang* were now also obliged to provide services, with the intention of distributing the cultivation obligations more equally, but this change had not had the desired effect. The replacement of the *cacah* by the *somahan* system, Kinder de Camarecq concluded, had not resulted in a radical restructuring of the peasant order in Sembir. Although the 44 *numpang* were now directly involved in growing coffee, they were still subordinate to the 17 landowners as sharecroppers. Study of the division of labour in the coffee gardens also showed that the *cacah* heads were taxed a little more heavily than the *numpang* and that three of the former were employed as a gang boss (*patinggi*), a coffee *mandur* (in the gardens) and a coffee supervisor (in the district). The *bujang* – young, unmarried, farm servants living in the *cacah* household – were also still exempt from all compulsory labour. They only worked on the orders of their master, as had always been the case. The last category to be exempt from corvee services (but not from growing coffee) were peasants who tended the apanage fields held by the chiefs and who were *panukang*, working directly under the orders of their masters (*juragan*) (Kinder de Camarecq 1861: 275).

Dating from around the same time is a description by Van Marle of a *kaluruhan* in the regency of Cianjur. Appointed as a *controleur* at the Land-Rent Income and Cultivation Office, he had taken the trouble to carry out a survey in 1852 on social life in a village community. He started by making it clear that *desa* life in the Sunda lands was different to that elsewhere on Java. A *kaluruhan* consisted of several *kampungs* or *lembur*, often surrounded by one or more hamlets (*babakan*). The obligation to provide services rested on the inhabitants, who were registered either as *bumi* (or *cacah baku*) or as *numpang*. Originally, only the landowners (*bumi* or *cacah baku*) were obliged to perform services, but when most of the *sawah* land fell into the hands of chiefs and the next of kin of the regent, there was a shortage of compulsory labour. This led to the obligation to be expanded to include the *numpang*, whose labour had formerly only been requisitioned on an occasional basis and who assisted the landowners if there was too much work. The *bujang* also did not perform forced labour unless ordered to do so by their master

or *juragan*. Lastly, the chiefs' paddy fields were tended by *panukang*, who were also exempt from compulsory labour. All these regulations applied, however, to corvee services but not to growing coffee. Everyone took part in picking the berries in the gardens, including women and children. The regent of Cianjur, who the *controleur* asked to verify the information he had received, told him that all those with property and no rights of exemption were obliged to provide corvee services. He specified property as: a wife, children, subordinates, *sawah*, buffalo, *pedati* and *kampung*. The more of these prerequisites, known as *rukun*, a man possessed, the more corvee services he had to provide. Anyone who possessed all these *rukun* was known as *gemblang* (fat) and his duty to provide services was the greatest. However, all those who exercised authority in some way or another were exempt from corvee services, together with women, the disabled, children under the age of fourteen and all those without property (*orang miskin*). A final category was those exempt because the chiefs required their labour services. These included the *orang pawong*, who worked in their lords' houses or stables, and the *rahayat*, who were part of his entourage. The latter had no fixed tasks, doing whatever the lord required of them. The exemption from the corvee services for all these people did not apply, however, to coffee cultivation or road repair work. They would perform this labour in turn. Van Marle noted that this regulation was not applied strictly. In the case of urgent work requiring a large number of hands, everyone capable had to help, including the elderly and young children. Van Marle's classification suggests that the situation he found was similar to that described by Kinder de Camarecq in Sembir. Van Marle, however, also provided figures to support his argument. The first *kaluruhan* he surveyed had 639 inhabitants divided among 117 households. Fifty-two of the households were exempt from corvee services, 24 because their heads were chiefs and 28 because they were elderly, disabled, *orang pawong* or *rahayat*. Of the remaining 65 households, 50 were obliged to work in the coffee cultivation system, and the other 15 performed other services: six maintained the regent's house, two worked at the brickworks, two manned the guards' lodges, two were responsible for the security of bridges, and one guarded the *pasangrahan*. A second *kaluruhan* had 1,327 inhabitants, with 216 households. Of these, 103 were exempt from corvee services (as chiefs, disabled, *orang pawong* and *rahayat*) and 113 had to provide services, 84 cultivating coffee and the rest performing a wide range of activities.

These sources describing the base of economic activity produce the following picture: firstly, the greater the capacity of the household, the greater was the burden of labour imposed upon it; secondly, only those

registered as obliged to provide labour services took part in the work in the coffee gardens; thirdly, the demand for labour was flexible, in the sense that if there was little work, many were not called up, while in busy periods practically everyone had to be available. *Kikir*, filing or scraping, was the name given to the campaigns introduced by directors and managers to mobilize labour. Even women, 'with their *sarung* tied up between their legs', were then forced to go to the gardens and help pick the berries. Only the eldest and the youngest remained behind in the villages. Exemption was a privilege extended to all who were acknowledged as chiefs or persons of local renown and it is clear from both sources that this was a considerable number of individuals. Lastly, the strong increase in the colonial tribute resulting from the expansion of coffee production under the cultivation system did not stop the landed gentry of the Priangan from successfully preventing the entire labour power of the peasants from being requisitioned. They continued to insist on servitude by their subordinates, and refused to account for this to the colonial authorities. They could not, however, prevent peasant labour being used for corvee and cultivation services on a colossal scale. In 1867, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies informed the regents and district and local chiefs that each individual eligible for corvee services could be required to perform these services at least 52 working days a year (one day a week) and that this burden should be shared as equally as possible (Colonial Report 1869-70: 309). How heavy was the burden of labour in the coffee gardens? According to a report by Van den Bosch, a total of 471,949 individuals from 14,119 households were involved in producing coffee in 1830 while 30 years later, when the population had risen to 829,525, of the total of 108,816 agrarian households, 89,900 were engaged in coffee cultivation (Enklaar 1871: 133). While the population count submitted by the native chiefs had less than doubled in this period, the number of people active in the forced cultivation of coffee had increased more than sixfold. The increase in volume of this most profitable of colonial goods was by no means proportionate to this mass mobilization of labour. Equally disturbing was the fact that more than half of these agrarian families did not own paddy fields. This percentage of landless was higher than elsewhere on Java and, together with the drastic rise in rice prices after the departure of the English interim government, appeared to suggest that too little attention was being devoted to growing food (*ibid.*: 134-5). In 1818, Van den Bosch had warned against excessive expansion of coffee production because it would have an adverse effect on the cultivation of paddy. It was a crisis in more than one sense, that could no longer be denied and required resolute action. But what was the remedy?

Table 6.5 Coffee production in the Priangan Regencies, 1801-70

Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul
1801	62,987	1811	21,348	1821	81,352
1802	46,143	1812	43,717	1822	68,361
1803	43,919	1813	43,866	1823	52,123
1804	56,053	1814	42,710	1824	54,094
1805	53,046	1815	60,186	1825	105,684
1806	78,874	1816	62,563	1826	77,838
1807	104,000	1817	68,578	1827	53,962
1808	112,028	1818	88,788	1828	46,306
1809	100,366	1819	65,303	1829	64,647
1810	99,428	1820	46,534	1830	52,735

Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul	Year	Pikul
1831	39,230	1841	168,130	1851	217,363	1861	116,900
1832	53,236	1842	250,598	1852	147,006	1862	82,700
1833	65,103	1843	171,803	1853	130,127	1863	172,600
1834	160,023	1844	152,123	1854	243,554	1864	31,200
1835	81,085	1845	57,150	1855	272,300	1865	90,800
1836	152,274	1846	123,690	1856	199,900	1866	205,300
1837	116,300	1847	126,707	1857	130,300	1867	136,300
1838	96,100	1848	92,136	1858	156,200	1868	48,106
1839	234,014	1849	39,647	1859	101,500	1869	136,812
1840	109,644	1850	103,132	1860	162,000	1870	126,698

1880	87,431	1890	28,041	1899	39,403

Source: 1800-10: De Haan I, 1910: 920-4
1810-30: *Nota omtrent de Javasche koffie, speciaal die uit de vroeger onder dier naam bekende Jacatrasche en Priangan landen, December 1833*. Van den Bosch Collection, 438.
NB. Between 1808 and 1821, the figures sometimes include coffee supplied by private estates in Krawang and Bogor.
1831-54: Colonial Report 1870-71: 2921-2
1855-70: Colonial Report 1871-80
NB. The archive sources disagree on the scale of production (reporting higher or lower figures for some years). These differences do not, however, affect the general trend: strong fluctuations from year to year and, until shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, a rising trend, followed by a fall which continued after 1870.

Table 6.6 Reported population growth in the Priangan Regencies, 1808-71

Year	Population	Year	Population
1808	146,700	1836	701,403
1815	188,000	1837	707,890
1817	191,000	1841	713,121
1822	198,057	1846	727,550
1823	207,275	1856	806,000
1829	470,031	1860	829,525
1830	471,949	1865	882,354
1833	554,771	1871	998,777

NB. These figures come from residency annual reports and other sources based on numbers submitted by native chiefs.

VII Winding up the Priangan system of governance

'A system that is arbitrary, repressive and secretive'

The public debate in the metropolis on whether to continue the cultivation system began to gain momentum after the middle of the nineteenth century and focused on the role of the government in the colonial economy. The question also arose of whether forced levies should be replaced by free labour as the basic principle of the cultivation of crops for export. The political choice that would ultimately be made was the outcome of a long-drawn-out dispute between the various schools of thought within and outside Dutch parliament. Advocates on all sides of the argument had to take account of the impact on public opinion in the mother country of the publication in 1860 of *Max Havelaar*. The book, written by former Dutch colonial official Eduard Douwes Dekker under the pen name Multatuli[34] and subtitled *'Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company'*, had in the words of the leader of the liberal lobby sent 'a shudder' through the country (Van der Meulen 2002: 418). The change in the foundations of colonial policy that gradually took shape was preceded by an extensive survey of the production of the two main commercial crops regulated under the cultivation system, coffee and sugar. In 1863, the government of the East Indies was ordered to recommend improvements in the coffee production of Java. The investigations which would be the basis for the new policy were initially entrusted to C.P.C. Steinmetz. As former Resident of the Priangan Regencies (1851-55) and as the author of yet another manual on the cultivation of coffee (1865), he was eminently qualified for the task. However failing health prevented him from what he set out to do and after his death in 1865 C.J. Bosch, Chief Inspector of the Department of Cultivations, was designated to complete the official enquiry. In 1868 he had completed his report – *Algemeen Verslag der Uitkomsten van het onderzoek betreffende de Koffijkultuur op Java* – which found its way through the bureaucracy to parliament in the Netherlands where it was included in the Proceedings of the States-General 1870-71. Because coffee cultivation was organized along different lines in the Priangan Regencies than in the rest of Java, the situation in this region and the problems that occurred there were described

34 Literally, 'I have suffered much'.

in a separate memorandum.[35] What is striking is the exceptionally critical tone of this account on the working and impact of the coffee regime in the Sunda highlands. 'A system that is arbitrary, repressive and secretive', was the judgment on the mode of production in the Priangan Regencies, which had previously received so much praise. Each of these three condemnations was explained in detail.

Secrecy had led to all information that might have detracted from the success of the colonial enterprise being omitted from official records, resulting in a make-believe portrayal that presented what was going on in exaggeratedly rosy terms and systematically underrepresented the reverse side of the policy pursued. The need to provide good news that would keep their superiors content caused officials to cover up or even distort facts and figures in their administration that might give the impression that set targets had not been met. If disappointing results of the coffee regime could no longer be suppressed, they were blamed on faulty decisions by a predecessor, e.g. the choice of the wrong terrain for plantations, or on circumstances beyond the control of the government, such as inclement weather. Only when the situation got really out of hand and failure could no longer be concealed, even the highest echelons of the bureaucracy had to come up with a radical reappraisal of what had been reported before. A poignant example of this belated acknowledgment of misrepresentation was the fiasco of indigo cultivation. Early indications that growing and especially processing this crop would seriously disrupt the peasant order in the Priangan were blatantly ignored. The whistle-blowers were reprimanded by their superiors higher up in the colonial machinery and told to shut up. The true scale of the indigo disaster did not penetrate to such lofty heights until Vitalis, as Inspector of Cultivation, drew attention to the widespread starvation, staggering mortality and mass desertion. Publicizing inconvenient information was traditionally considered improper, a blemish on the reputation of the obedient colonial official who knew exactly what his superiors expected of him: confirmation of the administrative order of the day. During the great coffee survey now under way, all district heads were asked if they were aware of any facts regarding the aversion of the peasants to coffee gardens being laid out at great distances from their villages. Shocked, the Assistant Resident for Sumedang stated that both the regent and the *controleur* had told him under oath that they had not given any information of such a nature to Chief Inspector Bosch. The

35 Aanteekeningen betreffende de koffiecultuur in de residentie Preanger Regentschappen, Bijlagen Handelingen van de Staten-Generaal 1870-71: 2759-2951.

latter added a note to this reply: 'It puts one in mind of a crime and it was indeed a crime in the Priangan to tell the truth to a delegated official of the government' (Colonial Report 1870-71: 2774). It can be assumed that the government's policy-makers did discuss its impact in detail, but that occurred without them having to account for their actions or to consult outsiders on the decisions they made. Colonial governance took place in a closed shop atmosphere and this inward-looking bias was only reinforced by the hierarchical structure of authority. The recalcitrant Multatuli was one of the few who broke through this wall of bureaucratic silence. He described the chain of good news that ran from the lower ranks of the colonial apparatus to headquarters, a fabricated optimism that the Governor-General upheld in his reports back to the metropolis.

> And what should the Governor-General do if someone should write him letters claiming that the Javanese are badly treated here and there? The answer is obvious. The Governor-General should not read the letters, as it is clear that reading such letters will disturb him in the fulfilment of his duty: protecting the Javanese people. And if the writer of such improper letters should persist? Then the Governor-General must make his displeasure known to him and force him to resign his post. This is how our system works, gentlemen. (Multatuli 1862: 59)

Brushing off undesirable news was not, however, restricted to the reports of European officials. They, in their turn, complained about being misled by the native chiefs, who also saw to it that only propitious news reached the ears of their superiors. The colonial officials had little direct contact with the peasantry. Inasmuch as this did occur, questions and answers that were exchanged during these encounters could be edited to comply with the desired portrayal of the situation. Penetrating to the base of society was no guarantee of the accuracy of the information obtained, as Kinder de Camarecq pointed out in the introduction to his detailed investigations of a Priangan settlement shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century.

> The respect of the Javanese, and especially the Sundanese, people for their regent is such that as soon as the lower chiefs order them in his name to deny or be silent about something, they will be certain to obey the order. (1861: 60)

The author emphasized that he had gathered his data during a recurring, long-lasting and good-natured survey he conducted in the settlement, with

no intervention from the regent. His knowledge of the Sundanese language had enabled him to follow the conversations of the district head – who remained present during his visits – and to ask further questions if he felt the need. This method of collecting data still qualified as 'supervised' investigation. It reveals the different layers of obfuscation and secrecy that made it difficult to obtain a clear picture of how the peasant economy actually worked. The official view focused on blaming the local chiefs for shirking their duties, while the colonial authorities remained carefully out of the line of fire.

Repression. The coffee report brought to light in great detail the onerous burden that the forced cultivation of coffee imposed on the people of the Priangan. The gradual relocation of production from in or close by the peasants' villages in the valleys to higher and distant gardens had made a significant contribution to this steadily increasing burden. 'The fatal system of planting coffee in regulated gardens had to predominate' was how one commentator summarized the trend of producing ever more and more beans (Colonial Report 1870-71: 2768). The distance that the peasants were made to travel to the gardens had increased considerably over time; to more than 30 poles, according to the most recently available figures. To make supervision easier, the gardens had been grouped together in gigantic plantations.

> The district of Ujungberung [Kulon], for example, has only one garden, which is tended by 44 dessas, some of which are 1-2, others 7, 8 or 9, but most 10, 12 and 14 poles distant. The district of Cilokotot also had one garden for 65 dessas; the districts of Pesser Maleber, Cikondang and Jampang Wetan, with a total of 62 dessas, also plant their coffee in one garden, while the distance to the dessas vary widely from 1 or 2 to 31 poles. (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2775)

In the very hilly terrain in which coffee was grown, covering a pole took twice as long as on a flat road. It was therefore not surprising, continued the report, that – given that it was much more difficult to tend to the trees and pick the berries in coffee gardens more than six poles away from peasant abodes in flat country – most gardens produced a very low yield. An instruction dating from before the introduction of the cultivation system, forbidding the laying out of plantations in the Priangan more than 12 poles from the settlements, was disregarded on a large scale and this continued to be the case in 1865 and 1866. Even this provision dating from an earlier era set the distance three times longer than for the rest of Java, namely

four poles. The only way to maintain the trees and pick the berries during the harvest season was to confine the peasants to the gardens. The work sites became temporary living quarters for both the labourers and their supervisors. The coffee report calculated that a skilled planter could pick the ripe berries from no more than 10 trees a day during the peak period. As the harvest extended over some 15 rounds, the work – after the berries had been picked, they had to be dried and the beans shelled – took up a large part of the labour capacity of the peasant household. According to an estimate by the Resident in 1864, this added up to around five months, 'during which time the people, with the exception of occasional visits, were away from their homes' (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2763). The labourers would often try to cut short their stay at the plantation by ripping the fruit from the branches too early, throwing away the green berries and only taking those that were ripe to the drying sheds. The adults and children used the sheds to sleep in at nights. These communal shelters were miserably inadequate and this way of life, which forced the peasants to live as coolies, led to 'much loose behaviour'.

After the work in the gardens was completed, the women and children returned home, but the men were not done until they had delivered the beans to the warehouses. This was, after all, besides growing the coffee, part of their compulsory delivery duties. Here, too, the distance from the gardens to the coffee warehouses was a serious problem. There were far fewer depots in the Priangan than in the other residencies on Java. The time required to transport the beans could extend to several days, and there would often also be a long wait at the depot, where the warehouse master refused to accept beans that had not been properly dried and sorted by quality. Rather than having to do this work all over again or wait even longer, the planters would often hide the rejected coffee or throw it into a gorge. The transport and delivery of the beans were not only time-consuming but also incurred costs that the planters had to pay themselves. They had to arrange for carts and draught animals, and the high mortality among the latter, caused by the bad state of the roads, meant that they might have to buy new animals en route. To spare the animals, some planters preferred to carry the beans to the warehouses on their own backs. This was clearly only possible for short distances. Sometimes the burden of transport was so strenuous that planters simply gave the beans away or were even prepared to pay hesitant recipients to take them off their hands (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2774). Lastly, the burden of work was made even heavier by the fact that the gardens regularly had to be relocated. The first harvest could take place when the trees started to bear fruit, but the yield began to decline already after a few years; most gardens

were only productive for five to seven years. They would then be abandoned and the work would be transferred to newly opened up land. All the work of laying out the garden, planting the trees and maintaining the crop in the first years before the trees began to bear fruit had to be performed without the planters receiving a single cent for their efforts.

Even when they were finally paid, it was still very little, despite the fact that the rate had been increased by 25 cents a *pikul* each year after 1859, until it had reached 6.5 guilders in 1867. It meant that for much more demanding work, the peasants were at best paid only half that earned by coffee planters in other residencies, while basic necessities were more expensive in the Priangan than elsewhere. Between 1853 and 1864, the lowest wage paid on Java for free, unskilled labour was 20 cents a day and, in some areas, could be as high as 50 cents. But only a few residencies paid the lowest rate for growing coffee. In the same 12-year period, the daily wage in the Priangan remained stagnant at 3.5 cents (Coffee Cultivation on Java 1871: 267). The coffee report sought the cause of this much lower wage in the operation of the Priangan system, which had subordinated the peasants to their lords in serfdom.

> Not only do the people of the Priangan pay as much tax as their counterparts elsewhere, they actually pay more. Collecting the taxes is beyond the control of the European authorities, and the lower class is left to the mercy, or lack of it, of the chiefs, and it is known how far that goes; we know from experience in the Priangan, that the tolerance and patience of the people are inexhaustible, and the chiefs take advantage of this to extort and torment their inferiors with no regard for their misery or the heavy burden impressed upon them. (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2773)

Based on the 118 days a year required to grow the coffee stated by the Resident – a figure that was much too low, according to the coffee report – the highest daily wage in the residency was nine cents in 1863 and the lowest less than one cent in 1864. The wages paid in the five regencies fluctuated from way below to far above these amounts. The conclusion that followed came as no surprise: the tortuous work and the exceptionally low payment had given the people an aversion to growing coffee. This observation was followed by statements by colonial officials who now had the opportunity to say what they had always had to suppress or deny. They had never been able to reveal facts that might have displayed the peasants' hatred of growing coffee. For example, that planters in Sukapura had once destroyed young coffee plants by pouring boiling water on them. It also became known that

a *controleur* in Garut once called out the *prajurit* (a corps of native police) to force the peasants to pick the coffee at bayonet point and that on many occasions the chiefs punished open resistance with immediate and cruel beatings. The *controleur* at Blubur acknowledged that wide-scale aversion did exist but added that it could not be supported by facts because the people were too scared to show their real feelings.

Arbitrariness. The more insight the colonial apparatus acquired into the native workfloor, by appointing *controleurs*, the fewer opportunities there were for escaping from the system of forced cultivation. Although the population continued to be undercounted, officials in the region were able to register more and more inhabitants who had escaped their notice in earlier counts, or had been intentionally kept out of their sight by the native chiefs. Colonial policy-makers saw the discovery of the *cacah*, the composite peasant household, as proof that there was a large pool of reserve labour which they could employ as they saw fit. The Resident had issued an order in 1839 that, from then on, the obligation to grow and deliver coffee would apply to each nuclear peasant household. The extent to which this instruction was actually enforced in practice can best be answered by reversing the perspective and examining how the peasants responded to this order for the mass mobilization of labour to grow coffee.

The descriptions referred to in the preceding chapter, of the situations in two peasant settlements in the regencies of Sumedang (by Kinder de Camarecq) and Cianjur (by Van Marle) shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, offer an impression of the way in which the increased burden was distributed among the local population. A considerable proportion of the inhabitants of these settlements were exempt from providing cultivation services. These were, in the first place, those who were unfit to work – small children, the elderly and the disabled – who lacked the physical strength to meet their own basic needs. Secondly, there was a privileged category consisting of chiefs, the clergy and others (including *hajis*), whose high status exempted them from taking part in compulsory coffee production. But these privileges were no longer permanent or complete. When the picking season arrived, they too had to join the army of labourers in the gardens. The instruction that women should pull up their *sarungs* between their legs showed that they, too were required to work. More or less the same applied to the corvee services that had to be performed for the government for a maximum of 52 days a year by the same classes of people who bore the brunt of the compulsory work in the coffee gardens. What was perceived by the colonial authorities as arbitrariness started with the peasants who worked as *panukang* in the fields of the landed gentry. The lords tried to

ensure that these labourers remained exempt from the cultivation and corvee services imposed by the government as far as possible and to call on their labour for their own private use. The same applied to the *rahayat*, who were part of the chiefs' entourage and had to perform a whole range of duties for their masters which would have become virtually impossible if they had to provide compulsory services for the government as well. Their status of *rahayat* to a prominent lord did not take the form of economic servitude but was primarily an honour indicative of a rank that gave them prominence in the peasant landscape, sufficient reason to claim exemption from compulsory services.

The final way in which the principle of universal servitude to the government was eroded in practice was through the possibility of buying exemption. Peasants who owned sufficient land could free themselves of the despised and low-paid work in the coffee gardens by paying lower chiefs an amount of money. As a result of all these exceptions, the households that were not exempt had to bear an even heavier burden. In essence, it meant that land-poor and landless households were more likely to have to fulfil their obligations to provide cultivation and corvee services than those that were better off. The colonial authorities did not concern themselves with these mutual arrangements, but were aware of them. Van Sevenhoven, the first Director of Cultivation, even devised a plan to wrest dependent members of composite households free from the grip of the *cacah* so that they could fulfil their labour obligations directly to the government. Clearly, not everyone was subject equally to the colonial tribute, despite what the instructions prescribed. The question then remains to what level the labour burden that the government imposed on peasant households in the Priangan had increased under the cultivation system.

Taxation, resistance and retribution

When forced coffee cultivation was first introduced in the early the eighteenth century it allegedly imposed no great burden on the planters. The trees, few in number at first, were planted close to the peasants' homes and supposedly required almost no maintenance. All the planters had to do was collect the berries when they fell from the trees. The berries were then dried in a shed and the peasants could process them into beans while continuing their work in the paddy fields. In short, it was a job that – at least in the eyes of VOC officials – required little effort and provided the peasant households with welcome additional income. That this was an

inaccurate portrayal of the situation became clear when coffee production was increased through the use of force. Compelling the peasants to work was seen as justified, firstly because it represented a continuation of traditional native practices, according to which the peasants were in servitude to their lords, and secondly because of the reluctance of the peasants to work of their own free will, a consequence of their non-economic mentality. Their inborn tendency to laziness and the absence of anything more than the simplest incentive to meet their basic needs had to be combated by imposing work morals and discipline. Force would lead to an increase in labour productivity, a precondition for a better livelihood in the long term. Gradually, another argument came to the fore which was intended to find a rationale for the claim on the peasants' labour. In this perception, which became the essence of the cultivation system, the tribute – in the form of a claim on land and labour – was seen as a form of taxation to which the people of Java had already been accustomed in the pre-colonial era. Van den Bosch calculated that the colonial equivalent of this tribute would entail making available one-fifth of agricultural land to grow export crops and an equal claim on the total labour power of the peasant population, set at 66 days a year. Without notification, the basic unit for meeting these obligations had been shifted from the male provider to all the members of the household, with the consequence that not only the head of the household but all other employable men, women and children had to pay tribute in the form of one-fifth of their joint labour power. It was a long time before the nature and size of the composite household, as the basic unit on which the peasant order was based, could be determined with any accuracy. The initial view of the *cacah* as the basic unit, on which Van den Bosch also based is calculations, allowed the peasants some scope to spread the tribute out over the three to four households that made up the *cacah*. That was no longer possible after the introduction in the Priangan of the numpang instruction in 1789 and the *somahan* instruction in 1839, which required each nuclear household to provide cultivation and other corvee services. This of course entailed far more than the 66 days a year that Van den Bosch had specified.

But how much more? Another way of calculating what level of taxation was acceptable dated from the end of the eighteenth century and prescribed the planting, maintenance and harvesting of 1,000 trees per household as the standard for servitude. The sources do not make clear why and when Rolff, the Commissioner for Interior Affairs who first set the target in 1789, arrived at this number. There is no doubt, however, that his decision was inspired by the growing demand for coffee by the VOC, which saw increasing opportunities for selling this commodity in the expanding

world market, rather than by the productive capability of the peasants. Henceforth, the norm of 1,000 trees was imposed by force with no one even bothering to find out how many working days were required to meet that target. When asked for his opinion, Resident Van der Wijck admitted in his report in 1856 that the scale of this burden effectively made it impossible to maintain and that the most that could be expected of the planters was two-thirds or even half of the set amount. But, he added, the peasants had become accustomed to the work regime. In 1835, after the introduction of the cultivation system, Van Sevenhoven had tried to persuade his superiors to adopt a more accommodating attitude towards the coffee planters. The brutal conditions in which the labourers had to work in the mountain gardens, which he estimated at 225 days a year including corvee services, and the exceptionally low payment they received for their efforts took on the tone of a complaint against the Priangan regime in his report. His call to at least increase the payment fell on deaf ears. On the contrary, the first Director of Cultivation was severely reprimanded for his candid protest. Van Gorkom, who had an intimate knowledge of coffee cultivation, observed in an article published in 1866 that a standard household of man, wife and children spent an average of 100 days in the mountain gardens. This calculation did not include, however, the time spent on laying out the gardens, planting young trees, drying the berries and processing them into beans, or transporting and delivering the coffee to the warehouses (Van Gorkom 1866: 400). The coffee report commissioned in 1863 also provided figures for the number of working days required to grow and deliver coffee in the Priangan: according to the Resident's calculations, tending to 1,000 trees from the laying out of the gardens to picking the berries and producing the beans took up an average of 125 days per household. Native chiefs came up with a slightly higher figure of 137 days. The authors of the report said that these figures were too low and incomplete, partly because they did not take account of the time the planters needed to get to the garden and to carry the beans to the warehouses. This is also shown by the statement elsewhere in the report that the work in the gardens took up no less than five months a year per household.

The burden of labour was not of course restricted to the forced cultivation of coffee. The government also requisitioned labour to provide corvee services for public works, including the building of not only roads and bridges, but also offices, warehouses, stables, sentry posts and accommodation for civil servants, the transport of goods and services, guarding roads and villages and, lastly, a small army of guards, messengers and servants for the official and personal convenience of colonial authorities. These obligations

could extend to 52 days a year for each taxable household. It was permitted to avoid this work by sending a substitute. The summary shows that cultivation and corvee services together monopolized the peasants' labour power for at least six months of the year. Because it was allowed to send substitutes or to buy exemption from these obligations, it is practically impossible to calculate the average burden imposed by all these services. The absence of the better-off, for payment or otherwise, meant that burden was heavier for those who did turn up for work, who mainly came from the land-poor and landless segments of the peasantry. The two categories of colonial servitude were recorded separately in the government's official records, but it was an incomprehensible and irrelevant distinction for the mass of those subjected to the regime of forced labour. Of course, the planters received a meagre payment for the coffee they delivered, while in most cases they were paid nothing at all for the public work they performed. In practice, however, the differences were much smaller than they appeared on paper. The work in the gardens fell under the cultivation system, while building drying sheds and accommodation for lower and higher work bosses, as well as the construction of depots and warehouses, were registered as corvee services in the official records. These compulsory activities, referred to generally as work by order of the government, imposed an excessively heavy burden on the peasant economy.

Over and above the colonial tribute to which the inhabitants of the Priangan districts were subjected, there were the shares of their food crops that they had to surrender to their lords. The most important was the *cuke*, which was set at one-fifth of the paddy yield; half of this went to the chiefs and the other half to the clergy. In addition to the *cuke*, the peasants had to supply a wide variety of other items, including bamboo, firewood, chickens and ducks, present gifts on festive occasions and during religious celebrations, perform stable and household services, and provide manpower for the building and maintenance of homes for the landed gentry. Lastly, there was a range of ad hoc taxes, for example on the sale or slaughter of cattle, a market tax, ferry tolls, inheritance tax and other tributes whenever they were demanded. And, of course, not to be forgotten, the tending of fields appropriated by the gentry and other services provided by the *panukang*, who the local chiefs tried to exempt from the colonial tribute as far as possible. Some of these claims were imposed on all of a chief's subjects, but other applied only to the *rahayat*, clients who were members of the lord's personal entourage. Servitude to the landed gentry could mean full or partial exemption from obligations towards the government, but in the course of time the colonial authorities gradually tightened their grip on the

Coffee warehouse on the Citarum river. The boats waiting to be loaded are owned by a private company contracted for shipping the coffee beans to the coast (photo pre-1880).

Source: KITLV Collection

local population, resulting in an accumulation of claims on the labour power of the peasants. The picture was made even more complex by the fact that the different kinds of servitude were not applied uniformly in practice. The better-off had more chance of being relieved of their obligations or, if that was not successful, they could show their willingness to serve by sending a substitute. This differentiation, however, does not change the fact that the total claim on the labour power of the peasants had risen to an extremely high level under the Priangan system.

Did the order from above to produce increasing volumes of coffee not meet with resistance from the people of the Sundanese highlands to the regime of forced cultivation? The government saw the lack of any overt and sustained resistance as proof that there was sufficient capacity among the peasants to raise the desired tribute. Peace had never been disturbed by mass protest and it had never been necessary to station troops in the region to maintain law and order. While persistent protest movements had threatened to develop into popular uprisings in other parts of Java, such as in the Princely States and neighbouring Cirebon, the people of the Priangan lands

were considered obedient and content with their lot. Their subordination to colonial domination was mediated through the authority of local chiefs. Acknowledging the latter's power and prestige had proved an effective and cheap means of forcing the peasants to deliver the main trade crop in the past century and a half. If they did not respond to the coercion with acts of resistance it was because their traditional subordination to the local chiefs was used to introduce the cultivation of coffee for sale on the world market and to steadily increase its volume. Of course, the landed gentry had to be paid for their loyal mediation but the cultivation commission received by the regents was only a fraction of the prices that the coffee raised at auctions in the metropolis. The awareness that without the collusion of the local lords the resistance of the peasants against the forced cultivation of coffee would have been much greater was a running theme in colonial reports from the end of the eighteenth century. This streamlined image of forced cultivation and delivery did not mean however that there had been no resistance at all. It was a sensitive topic that was treated with considerable reluctance or avoided completely in official reports. The government could only uphold the impression of docile peasants and their co-opted lords if resistance was presented as sporadic, limited in scale and easy to defuse. And then only by not looking behind the official facade of favourable facts and opinions for evidence to invalidate them. Occasionally, however, and almost in passing a reality was exposed that was intended to remain concealed. For example, in the private correspondence between Van den Bosch and Baud, shortly after the introduction of the cultivation system, in which they discussed with obvious concern reports of land flight from the Priangan and Cirebon and mentioned the rebellious spirit that dominates in the latter region.[36] Would the resistance to the heavy tribute not lead to a new war in Java after the one that had been successfully fought in Central Java from 1825-30?

The mild and generous attitude to the usually obedient Priangan population soon made way for a harder approach if the progress of the coffee cultivation came under threat. Affairs like that described by Multatuli in Lebak also occurred in the Priangan. A complaint, for example, submitted anonymously for fear of being punished simply for reporting it. Such cases, of claims that intimidation had taken on violent form with the lower local chiefs being the main culprits, found their way into colonial reports. They could also, after all, be interpreted as proof that hard-handed action was regrettable but necessary. In his time,

36 Letter from Baud to Van den Bosch, 24 February 1832 in Westendorp Boerma, J.J. *Briefwisseling tussen J. van den Bosch en J.C. Baud*, part 2, Utrecht 1956: 107.

Commissioner Rolff did not shy away from calling prestigious chiefs to order by slapping or kicking them, bawling out regents in public and threatening to dismiss or banish them. It was Nicolaus Engelhard himself who asserted that no native would wish to plant coffee without the use of physical force, being beaten or put in the stocks (De Haan I, 1910: 160). As repressive measures against the higher native chiefs involved in coffee affairs gradually became milder, it was mainly the lower chiefs, such as *petingi* and garden *mandur* who were called to order with a flogging or being chained in the stocks. Punishing the bosses of work gangs now aroused colonial sympathies.

> Such a poor fellow was then humiliated for many hours, hung up by his big toes, buried bare-headed in the mud, etc. It is no surprise that he would then later take every opportunity to vent his rancour on the gang he supervised. This was how mutual hatred was aroused in the villages. (Janssen 1888: 8)

Corporal punishment was banned in 1866, but it is doubtful whether it was strictly enforced. Illustrative of the general attitude was the approving tone in which, many years later, an incident was recalled during which Kinder de Camarecq had devised an original method of putting a stop to the widespread theft of cattle while he was serving as Assistant Resident in Sumedang in 1854. He summoned all 30 district heads in the regency to his office and told them each to bring the ten most likely culprits from their districts with them. When all 300 suspects were assembled before him, he ordered them first to identify from their midst 30 as possible cattle thieves. The group of 30 were them asked who were the three 'baddest' among them, after which these three had to decide amongst themselves who the 'guilty party' was. This man was then informed that, every Saturday, he would be given 40 lashes in the presence of the whole group. This public chastisement would continue until the criminal confessed. The first flogging took place immediately and when everyone returned the following week, his wounds were not yet healed and he fell into a swoon after twelve lashes. When he regained consciousness, he begged to be hanged but his judge said that the punishment would continue every week until he confessed (Gonggrijp 1919: 974-5). Almost three-quarters of a century later, the chronicler of this incident expressed his admiration for the innovative and resolute action of this colonial official. According to him, Kinder de Camarecq continued to be seen by the people of Sumedang as a man who brought them order, peace and prosperity.

Repression continued to be endemic to coffee cultivation, but the colonial authorities' view of the situation extended no further than the native managers, who were held responsible for day-to-day discipline on the workfloor. And was it not, incidentally, the higher and lower chiefs who tended to resort to excessive violence to punish their subordinates? They made use of agents, known as *jagos* or fighting cocks, who came from the peasant class, were familiar with the local situation, provided information that was not available through the regular channels, and spared their bosses all kinds of *susah* (Sollewijn Gelpke 1879: 142-4; Hasselman 1891: 104). In the colonial state system, these fighting cocks acquired a new role, acting as informal mediators for the chiefs, intimidating the peasants – if necessary by the use of violence – to fulfil their tributary obligations. In this sense, the *jagos* had become exponents of the colonial power structure (Schulte Nordholt & Van Till 1999). They also sometimes worked at their own risk, initiative and expense. In his indictment of the evils of the cultivation system, Vitalis mentioned gangs, led by close relatives of the regent, who committed robberies and murders in Cirebon. In his view, the population was nowhere as badly tormented and repressed than in the Priangan Regencies. He related how, during an inspection tour of the region, he had encountered a group of ten old men, who had been tied by their thumbs to a rope thrown over the branch of a tree. They had then been hoisted up until their toes could just touch the ground. Another time, he came across naked men with their arms tied crosswise and lying on the ground, where they remained exposed to the blazing sun. According to the inspector, it was not only members of the gentry who committed such excesses. Dutch officials were also guilty of harassment and torture, including beating victims until they were half (or completely) dead and, in another instance, covering the bare upper body of a young woman with ants (Vitalis 1851a: 118-20).[37]

The continuing and far-reaching surveillance in both the villages and the coffee gardens – the costs of which were not borne by the government – ensured that resistance did not develop into collective action. Although the coffee report noted a few incidents that had not previously come to light, it by no means reflected the extent or the nature of the peasants' obstinate refusal to work. It is perhaps suggested a little more clearly in a report on the

37 This Inspector of Cultivation not only had strong words to say about the perpetrator of this abusive treatment, but also mentioned another case that he had witnessed in a report that he sent to G.G. Rochussen. When he received no response, he repeated his complaint verbally at a reception at the palace in Bogor. The Governor-General reprimanded Vitalis on this occasion that his actions were inappropriate and ordered him never to trouble him with such cases again (TNI, 1852: 295).

long waiting times at the warehouses that made the peasants 'recalcitrant' and could only with great difficulty be prevented from throwing their loads into a gorge. This is not easy to reconcile with the traditional portrayal of the Sundanese people in the official records as docile and timid, acquiescing in their fate. The peasants employed the weapons of the weak, but it was an arsenal that they used frequently and on a large scale. The *controleur* at Sukabumi gave a number of examples of sabotage and determined obfuscation, which the authorities could do nothing to discourage.

> 1st tending to gardens carelessly and inadequately, despite repeated orders to do it better, for instance damaging the trees with the *pacul*, despite being ordered to keep a foot away from the trunk with tools;
>
> 2nd picking and transporting berries carelessly, so that they can be found, including many unripe ones, on the ground in the gardens and on the roads, proof of insufficient care, while dried coffee berries still hang on the trees. (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2774)

The machine of coffee cultivation, which had steadily moved into a higher gear over a period of a century and a half, had now lost its power and momentum. The planters refused any longer to do what was required of them: to grow and deliver ever larger quantities of coffee. As Van Gorkom observed, more and more trees were producing fewer and fewer beans (1866: 400). Colonial reports had described the Javanese people in general and the inhabitants of the Priangan in particular as almost endearingly docile and eager to please. That cliché was fuelled by the argument that there had seldom been collective and organized open rebellion, while the authorities persistently refused to acknowledge the covert and stubborn resistance that the people – with no other means at their disposal – displayed in response to all attempts to force them to cooperate in a system of production in which they were ruthlessly exploited. With hindsight, it is necessary to revise the impression that there had been no public resistance to the forced cultivation of coffee. Cirebon remained a hotbed of unrest for the entire period in which coffee cultivation imposed a heavy burden on the people and Peter Carey refers to sources showing that the peasants' hatred of growing coffee was an important reason for the broad popular support Dipanegara enjoyed in the early years of the Java War (Carey 2007: 466). Reports from the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century refer to considerable land flight, the classic form of protest resorted to by peasants labouring under an excessive burden of obligations.

Table 8.4 shows how the colonial apparatus steadily lost its grip on coffee cultivation in the Priangan Regencies. It compares the way in which the system was applied in the East Javanese district of Pasuruan and in the Sundanese highlands between 1853 and 1864, the results and revenues, the scale of the harvests and the annual payments to the planters. The figures hardly require detailed elaboration. Although the number of trees in the Priangan Regencies had increased enormously and most of the coffee was produced in gardens, the revenue remained far behind that of Pasuruan. The heavier burden of cultivation services imposed on the people of the Sunda highlands produced fewer rather than more coffee beans, while the incomes of the Sundanese planters stagnated also at a much lower level.

Table 7.1 Coffee cultivation in Pasuruan and the Priangan from 1853 to 1864

	Pasuruan	***Priangan***
Total number of coffee-planting households in the 12-year period	386,291	1,061,020
Total number of trees in gardens	41,153,873	596,918,294
Number of trees in *kampungs*, *pagars* and forests	276,123,535	174,249,973
Coffee production in *pikul*	2,129,601	1,535,157
Number of trees to maintain per household:		
– in gardens	112	563
– in *kampungs*, *pagars* and forests	750	164
Average annual production in *pikul* per household	5.78	1.73
Average number of trees required for 1 *pikul* of coffee	140	464
Average household income per year	fl. 54.91	fl. 6.70

Source: Coffee Report 1870-71: 2776

Cultivating coffee and growing food

Separate attention should be devoted to the question whether the forced cultivation of coffee took place at the expense of growing food. The prevailing view was that it did not affect the way the peasants met their basic needs. After all, coffee was not grown on the land that they used to grow food. While coffee trees were largely planted in mountain gardens, the *sawahs* were mainly located near the streams and rivers down in the valleys. From this perspective, by contrast with the sugarcane grown on the lowlands, producing coffee did not impinge on any of the resources the peasants needed for their basic survival. Both Cees Fasseur (1975) and Robert Elson (1994) used this argument to suggest that, as it was grown

high up in the mountains, coffee had a much less radical and burdensome effect on the peasant economy. But did coffee indeed require as little land as this favourable appraisal suggests? Laying out dry or irrigated fields close to the coffee gardens to grow paddy was not allowed to keep pace with the expansion of the coffee cultivation itself. The labourers mobilized to perform the heavy work required to prepare the land for new plantations had to survive on roots and plants they found growing in the wild. When they went to the gardens to tend the trees and pick the berries, they took food with them from their homes and, if that ran out before they were finished, new supplies would be brought up. The peasants were not permitted to use abandoned gardens – of which there were many – for growing food. This instruction had to be re-issued in 1854 because the peasants invoked age-old rights to cultivate waste land. The colonial authorities refused to release gardens that were no longer in use as they expected to be able to resume production when the soil had become productive once again. Conversely, the increasing scarcity of land to grow food in the lower-lying areas forced the peasants to lay out rice fields where they had not done so before. The enormous expansion of coffee cultivation after 1840 had made the shortage of suitable terrain for new coffee gardens even more acute, so that the government laid claim to all as yet unused land in the immediate vicinity of the *kampungs*. In this light little remains of the argument that growing coffee and paddy did not compete for the same land.

The colonial high command was of course aware that coffee production could only expand if the peasants had enough food to eat. In the VOC era, the Company officials knew that the people could only fulfil their obligation to supply commodities if they had sufficient time and space to grow paddy. In the report describing his impressions during his first stay in the colony, Van den Bosch had warned against excessive expansion of coffee cultivation at the expense of food production (1818: 225). He was, however, the first to completely ignore his own good advice when he returned as Governor-General. A later commentator called this forgetfulness typical of this man, who did not concern himself in the least with the welfare of the population (Enklaar 1871: 134-5). The shortage of paddy fields meant that even a minor failure of the crop would result in insufficient staple food and supplies had to be brought in at short notice from elsewhere. The priority given to expanding coffee cultivation after Dutch rule was restored in 1816 caused the price of paddy to double. An instruction banning the export of paddy from the Priangan districts resulted in a further rise, rather than the intended fall. There were serious famines in the highlands

on at least two occasions. Pieter Engelhard recorded the first in 1804-05, attributing the widespread starvation to the forced planting of hundreds of thousands of coffee trees (De Haan IV, 1912: 462-3). Although the shortage was here limited to a few districts, there were considerably more victims in 1833-34 when the introduction of indigo caused the paddy crop to fail in the Sumedang and Sukapura regencies. An official report, which was only made public much later, concluded that:

> a large percentage of the population had to survive on roots and leaves, while thousands died of hunger. (Report of the Priangan residency for 1846: 88)

The virtual stagnation, if not reduction, of coffee cultivation in the Priangan under British rule offered the peasants a welcome pause for breath. The Resident, who returned to his old post after Dutch rule was restored in 1815, noted in his first report that new paddy fields had been laid out everywhere and that the number of *kampungs* had increased substantially (De Haan IV, 1912: 463). In his report for 1822, Van Haak noted that the peasants had no time to grow any crops other than their own staple food and coffee. One consequence of this was that they no longer produced the cotton they needed to weave their own cloth. This contraction of the rural economy meant that the peasants now had to buy more expensive foreign textiles to clothe themselves. Van Haak did not fail to mention that it would be incorrect to interpret this as evidence of increased welfare, since there was no longer a cheaper alternative. The lower paddy harvest in 1821, resulting from an outbreak of cholera, and the resulting price rise encouraged the peasants to sell their share of the harvest to pay off their debts rather than use it to feed themselves and to lay in a store of seed for the new season. The Inspector of Finances expressed his concern about food production lagging behind the cultivation of coffee. Measures to increase paddy production, no matter how important they were to meet the demand, must not however be taken at the expense of what was and remained the most important concern: the cultivation and delivery of as much coffee as possible. In his 1834 memorandum on the state of affairs in his regency, Bandung, Assistant Resident Nagel noted that he impressed on the native chiefs and priests the necessity of ensuring that the paddy fields were tended to in good time every year. That his show of concern was not heeded, or not to a sufficient degree, is clear from statements by native sources, consistently underutilized in the colonial historiography of Java. In a publication on the situation in the early nineteenth century, Soekanto referred to a prediction by the famous

painter Saleh that the heavy burden of labour imposed on the peasantry would ultimately lead to a popular uprising (Soekanto 1951: 29).

Buying up paddy, openly or by smuggling, could easily upset the precarious balance between supply and demand. The first step taken if a food deficit occurred or threatened was to introduce a ban on exporting paddy from the region. In the case of an acute shortage, the authorities arranged for a supply of paddy, cheaply or even free of charge, hastily brought in from elsewhere. It was of course more effective to expand the area of land used to grow paddy and to support the construction of irrigation networks. The government would occasionally offer grants to encourage the cultivation of food crops. Nevertheless, there continued to be a chronic shortage of paddy fields because coffee cultivation imposed a disproportionate burden on the labour of the peasants, leaving them insufficient time to till, let alone expand their own fields. In addition, the gentry laid claim to a large proportion of the food production. Landowners were obliged to surrender a fifth of the food they produced. Local chiefs and clergy used the *cuke* not only for their own consumption but also traded it on the market. As the population of Batavia and the surrounding countryside increased, the paddy from the Priangan could be sold easily at not too great a distance. As we shall see later, the regents earned more from selling part of their share of the food crops than from the commission they received for their mediation in the production of coffee. In 1848 the regent of Limbangan sent a letter to the *kepala cutak* (district chiefs) of the regency, ordering them to make sure that the *panghulu* and *lebeh* inspected the *sawahs* under their command daily.

The trade in paddy was so lucrative for the local chiefs that there was at times a risk of food shortages because they demanded that the cultivators surrender food needed for their own requirements (Van Deventer III, 1866: 186). As before, the authorities blamed the peasants themselves for the resulting shortages. According to the received wisdom, they were inherently lazy, lived from day to day and knew that the government would help them if the situation became serious (Croockewit 1866: 318). The combination of growing paddy and coffee created a dilemma. The colonial authorities could only expand coffee production on higher ground in the mountains, but had to allow the peasants to settle as close as possible to the lower-lying *sawahs*. This combination remained feasible until the end of the eighteenth century, but the fourteen-fold rise in the number of coffee trees in the mid-nineteenth century increased the distance between the villages and the gardens even more. The problem was related not only to the choice of which land to use but also the way production was organized. Planting the coffee close to the villages had led to a loss of control over production. Relocating

it to the large mountain plantations made it much easier to supervise the work regularly and to keep the workforce under tight control.

The welfare of the people

There was considerable disagreement about the impact of coffee cultivation on the local population that persisted for the entire period during which the Priangan regime was in force. The introduction of the coercive system was justified by the low standard of living of the peasantry, supposedly caused by their non-economic mentality. From this perspective, discipline had to be imposed to ensure progress for both the country and its people. It was an early expression of the late-colonial doctrine that foreign rule should be seen as a means to realize the economic potential that could not be achieved from within. By contrast with the opinion widely held earlier that colonies were there to serve the interests of the metropolis, this *mise-en-valeur* argument gave priority to the ultimate benefits for the local population. The former view had lost little of its cogency in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as can be seen from statements by Governors-General like Daendels and Van den Bosch. It was not until the middle of the century that the idea that the impact on the local population should be the yardstick for assessing the outcome of colonial domination began to gain ground in the public debate on what direction that policy should take.

The discussion on the operation of the cultivation system focused partly on its consequences for the welfare of the population. Early answers to this were unanimously favourable: the unfreedom in which the inhabitants had been accustomed to living from generation to generation remained in place for the time being, but was no great burden to them as they were simple people who were attached to custom. The colonial rulers, however, made every effort to improve their livelihoods and kept a watchful eye on the extortionate practices of the native chiefs. The simple and regular nature of coffee planting opened for the peasants the path to a less troublesome way of life. Anyone travelling through the Priangan could only conclude that the inhabitants were content with their lot. Of course, the peasants had to learn to work diligently, but they were treated with leniency and were paid accordingly. Land flight no longer occurred, a sign that the situation of the inhabitants of the region had substantially improved. In short, coffee cultivation had a beneficial impact and appeared to offer the prospects of final redemption from their state of servitude. A little over a decade later, however, Van Hoëvell, as the most vocal critic and a campaigner for

a change of regime, came to a completely different conclusion after his tour through the Sundanese highlands. Compared with the situation in the other residencies on Java, he had been struck by the deep misery and immense lethargy of the people in this region. This clergyman, who was later to lead the liberal faction in Dutch parliament, identified the Priangan system as the root cause of these problems, as it allowed the native chiefs to take advantage of their subordinates.

The opinions of successive Residents in the region varied widely. I restrict myself to those who held office later and who expressed their views on whether the Priangan system should be continued. Within the colonial apparatus, doubts about this undeniably increased over the course of time. After the involvement and leadership of the regents had been considered indispensable in getting the people to do what they were ordered to do for more than a century – to grow and supply increasing quantities of coffee – the balance of costs and benefits now seemed to have swung in the opposite direction. This reversal began to manifest itself from the end of the 1830s. There had certainly been critical voices before, but they had always been tempered by the counter-observation that the authority of the chiefs was necessary to overcome the aversion of the peasants to the claims on their labour. Symptomatic was the strongly critical tone of the memorandum drawn up by Inspector of Cultivation Ament reporting on his inspection of coffee production in the Priangan at the end of 1839. He observed that the gentry had taken control of most of the wet-rice land and forced their subordinates to tend to the fields without remuneration. The peasants suffered even heavier burdens and, besides the forced cultivation of coffee, had to perform more public and private corvee services than their counterparts elsewhere on Java, while they received hardly a third of the amount paid to coffee planters in other residencies. J.F. Hora Siccama, who was Resident between 1839 and 1841, agreed with these conclusions and stated that the situation of the people of the Priangan was by no means as favourable as many claimed. He added that the influence of the chiefs must be great and the docility of the peasants unlimited for this system to survive, but no one could seriously deny that it was extremely unfair and repressive. His successor, Cleerens (1841-46), did not hesitate in rejecting this criticism out of hand. He denied that the people of the Priangan were in a pitiful state and advised against any reform of the existing system. P.J. Overhand, who came after him (1846-50), had been the Resident of Banyumas and had expected to find the inhabitants of his new jurisdiction in a state of greater need. He was relieved to discover that this was not the case and that the level of poverty was not so severe at all. He expressed his opinion

shortly and sharply: 'The misery, in which the lower class of the people live, according to critics with no first-hand knowledge of the situation, does not exist' (De Waal 1866: 369). Minister for the Colonies Pahud did not share this viewpoint. In a memorandum in early 1851, he noted that the widespread poverty and misery in which the people of the Priangan Regencies lived inevitably meant that the Dutch rulers could not make themselves popular in the region. At the end of the same year, Governor-General Rochussen explicitly contradicted him. On his resignation, Rochussen showed himself to be an outspoken supporter of the status quo. Van der Wijck, Resident from 1855-58, also proved in his 1857 memorandum to be a fervent defender of the work regime that had existed in the Sundanese highlands for so many generations. He admitted that the peasants led a meagre existence, but refused to listen to tales of distress and improvidence. On the contrary, he concluded that, on the basis of his experience, the peasants on Java were nowhere as prosperous as in this region.

Supporters and opponents of a change of regime created the impression, however, that their contrasting standpoints were based on how they valued the income that the cultivation system generated for the treasury. In positive assessments of the system, colonial interests – in other words, those of the metropolis – took precedence, while its impact on the native population was and remained a subordinate question. This was also why the members of parliament in the Netherlands, having at length discussed the critical coffee report of 1868, concluded at the end of their deliberations that major changes were indeed required but revisions should not have a negative impact on the profit made from this cultivation. Abandoning the welcome flow money into the Dutch treasury – still estimated at around 50 million guilders annually – was considered too high a price to forfeit. Reforms were due, no doubt, but not in haste and no drastic ones, was the political message to the policy-makers (Goedhart 1948: 64-5). I leave my own judgment on the social impact of the Priangan system until the final chapter, which is both a review of the past and a preview of the consequences of the regime in the longer term for people's welfare. In advance of this weighing up of the policy pursued in the Priangan lands, I would like to draw attention in this part of my argument to the differentiated impact of the colonial tribute over a period of around a century and a half. Examining the effect of forced coffee cultivation on the native population between 1720 and 1870 shows that its consequences varied for different classes within it. This was largely due to the unequal distribution of the burdens imposed on the people, and especially on taxing the labour power of peasant-producers. In accordance with traditional practice, the tribute was imposed on the propertied class,

the landowners who laid claim to the largest share of the means of existence. Because they had greater carrying capacity, it was reasonable to tax them more harshly than the class that possessed little or no agrarian property. In an attempt to increasingly raise the level of the tribute as a result of the growing demand for colonial goods on the world market, the VOC and later the government switched to a more widely distributed means of collecting it, which was intended to have a levelling effect. In practice, the system of coffee cultivation meant that the main landowners designated land-poor and landless households to do the work that had been imposed on everyone under the rules of public servitude. The social structure was already based on a division between lords and peasants; the colonial regime, with the tribute as its main component, simply reinforced these divisions and the complexity of the hierarchical order. One indication of this was that, in 1860, of the 108,816 households that practised agriculture in the Sunda highlands, more than a third possessed no paddy fields, a significantly higher percentage than elsewhere on Java (Enklaar 1871: 134). Another source set the landless class even higher, at more than half, pointing out that the area of land used to grow food was growing more slowly than the population (Aardrijkskundig en statistisch woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië, 1869: 832-3). The Priangan system had helped advance a process of proletarianization in that small landowners in particular found themselves having to sell their *sawahs* and even having to give the buyer money to relieve themselves of the oppressive burden of labour (Scheltema 1927-28: 292). Abandoned paddy fields were not rare and local chiefs would add them to the land they already had appropriated. The colonial sources devote little attention to how this agrarian underclass emerged in the Priangan Regencies. I will examine the social and economic polarization that developed over time more closely at the end of the following chapter. The small paddy growers of the Priangan had been turned into coffee coolies. Besides growing paddy and coffee there was hardly any other economic activity in the region. The report for 1846 noted the lack of regular market places and sheds to store goods in the residency. *Warung* stalls offered a variety of food and goods for daily consumption in the headquarters of each regency, but this was on a very small scale (Report on the Priangan Regencies 1848: 90).

Good governance

The cause of the crisis that developed in extracting the tribute was not primarily sought in the heavy burden under which the population laboured

or the meagre payment the planters earned for their work, but in the way coffee production was managed. Although it was now accepted that it had to be organized along different lines and that it was no longer possible to further postpone a modest increase in the price paid to the producers, what primarily emerged was the need for the colonial bureaucracy to come closer to the workfloor and become more directly involved in the manner of exploitation. This came down to eliminating the authority of the regional aristocracy, on which the Priangan system had been founded since the early eighteenth century. This modality had been chosen in the time of the VOC because of the lack of insight into and control over the structure of native society. The rationale was that the new rulers, operating in a landscape that was alien to them, had insufficient reach to take charge of the collection of the tribute at the source. The forced cultivation and delivery of crops for export to the metropolis was allegedly the continuation of a pre-existing practice deriving from the servitude of the peasants to the landed gentry. This was a biased appraisal of their relationship devised to legitimize the claim on the labour power of the population. The lords of the Priangan acquired more power than they had ever had before and the peasants found themselves – as a result of the policy of sedentarization, territorialization and hierarchization – confined in a relationship of subordination that they had not experienced in the pre-colonial era. Deserting or looking for another lord who was less demanding, as frequently occurred in the past, was no longer an option. When the early-colonial state was set up in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the existing method of raising taxes in the Priangan Regencies was maintained. Elsewhere on Java, a different form of indirect governance was chosen, namely the *desa* system, which was also a colonial invention (Breman 1979 and 1980). In the Sunda highlands, the government remained at a distance from the workfloor of peasant production. The continued mediation of the regional gentry was required to ensure the servitude of the peasant settlers in growing and delivering larger quantities of coffee. This mode of production, now designated more correctly than previously as the Priangan system, combined high profits with low costs, as supervision and management were paid at the expense of the monetary reward received by the peasants. The principle of cheap governance on which colonial exploitation in the Sunda highlands had been based was abandoned in the final quarter of the nineteenth century when there was a growing awareness that the disadvantages of indirect rule were greater than their advantages. What had so long been an exception to the governance model introduced in the rest of Java earlier in the century now had to be adapted to it. In that sense the abolition of the Priangan

system accommodated the desire to streamline the colonial bureaucracy across the island.

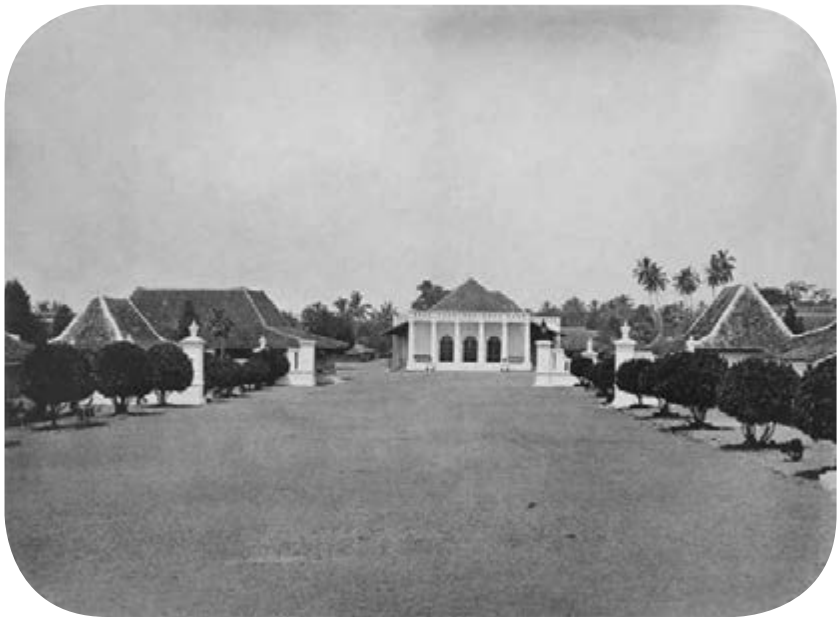
Behind the expressions of praise, repeated *ad nauseam*, for the way in which the chiefs had contributed to the system of forced cultivation throughout the years, serious doubts had always been voiced about the genuine willingness of the regents and their subordinates to commit themselves to increasingly high targets. The assumption that the landed gentry managed to get the peasants to do more than a small number of colonial officials would be able to achieve could no longer be taken for granted. Certainly, the idea that the peasants' servitude towards the regents was the best way of overcoming their aversion to forced cultivation was still to be found in official memoranda, but the question was whether the native chiefs actually performed their tasks as surmised. The high command in the metropolis became increasingly doubtful about this as time passed. These sceptical voices culminated in the accusation of failing management, as the coffee report bluntly stated (Coffee Report 1870-71: 2759) The criticism manifested a reversal of the previously so favourable opinion of the exceptional qualities of the generously rewarded taskmasters of the coffee production, who had successfully persuaded the people of the Priangan to abide by the rules of the cultivation system and made sure they continued to do so. That this was no longer the case was blamed on the chiefs and not on the peasants. Underlying the criticism was the suspicion that the lords did not possess the necessary entrepreneurial acumen to raise the tribute to the required level. This appraisal was based on the conviction that the regents' feudal lifestyle did not equip them to act decisively and to show their subordinates the way forward to progress. Was the parasitical way of life of which the local chiefs were now accused not, however, the logical consequence of a policy initiated in the VOC era, to place the lords on a pedestal and force the population to remain subject to them, and to use this servitude as a lever to impose an excessive tribute?

In a retrospective review of his time in office, the architect of the cultivation system continued to adhere to his standpoint that eroding the position of the native chiefs would weaken colonial authority (Van den Bosch 1864: 104). On the other hand, there was no lack of early supporters of the view that giving the native chiefs a privileged position would be counterproductive. Andries de Wilde already considered the regents superfluous in his time. He proposed shortly and sharply that these good-for-nothings should be relieved of their functions, allocated an annual allowance and allowed to keep only the paddy fields that were their own personal property, while

their positions as coffee managers should be taken over by Dutch officials (De Wilde 1830). The course adopted by Godert van der Capellen after the restoration of Dutch rule ran completely counter to this advice: permitting the native chiefs their dignity, showing them the respect that their elevated status required, but also restricting them to a role that permitted them no economic interest of their own. They must not show any entrepreneurial ambitions at all and were explicitly forbidden from any commercial activities, such as engaging in trade, transporting goods, or acting as business partners. Permitting them only a purely decorative significance, limiting them to displays of prestige so as to instil in their subordinates their duty of unswerving loyalty, did not however affect their position as managers of the coffee production. They were not permitted to engage in business activities at their own risk and expense, but as managers working for the government they had to meet high standards. The contradictory nature of these obligations was not a subject of discussion, but as the years passed the colonial rulers became increasingly irritated by the regents' insistence on idle ostentation, their privilege to do nothing other than make a show of their prestige and status. This displeasure was expressed in the administrative reorganization of the Priangan that now followed.

Van Rees, the special investigative commissioner entrusted with this delicate operation wrote in the letter accompanying his final report in 1867 that the special rights claimed by the gentry in the Priangan were the figment of colonial imagination and practice. The backward nature of native governance should be replaced by the *modus operandi* of the regular bureaucracy that had already been introduced in the rest of Java half a century earlier. The incentive for excluding the native aristocracy from the exercise of colonial power was partly the observed desire of the Sundanese chiefs for a life of pomp and circumstance as far removed as possible from the common people. The appearance of the regents in public, surrounded by their entourage of clients, had the air of a display of sacral authority that harked back to the behaviour of the princes in the pre-colonial era. It had all the ceremonial trappings of sovereign authority, with the *priyayi* surrounding the ruler according to rank. In this courtly atmosphere, a form of stylized behaviour developed, emphasized by the proximity of courtiers around the regent, that removed itself from the milieu of the common people, while serving as a model for them. Even the simplest of peasants carried themselves with a modesty and dignity that outsiders found striking. The 'modern' colonial observer took objection to the demonstrative display of native humility towards superiors, but was also aware that it helped maintain peace and order.

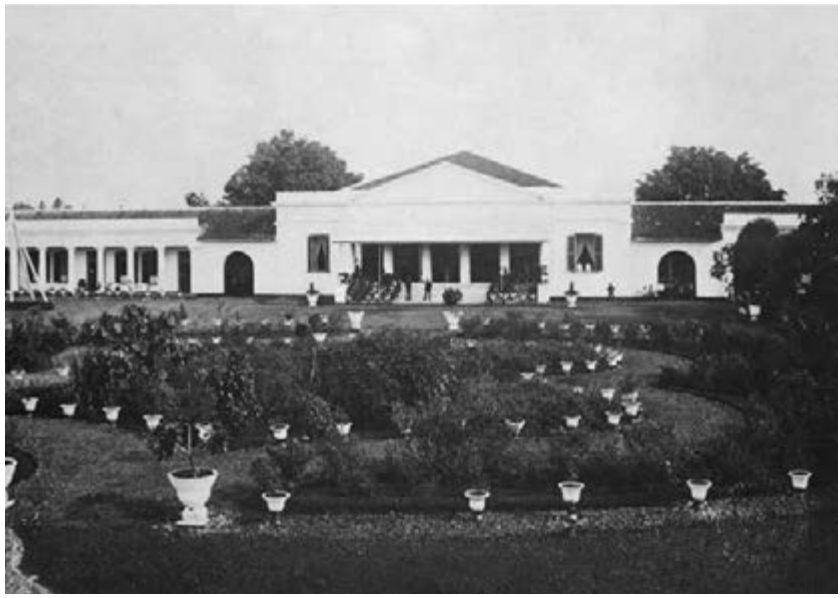
Kraton of the regent in Cianjur. His residence-cum-office was destroyed by an earthquake in 1879.



Source: KITLV Collection

The aristocracy, to which the peasantry naturally showed their first allegiance, could no longer do anything right in the eyes of their foreign rulers. The respect and courtesy to which the local chiefs were entitled, according to Van der Capellen, had made way for contempt and condescension. Behind their facade of eminence, they were seen as displaying no outer, let alone inner, features of civilized behaviour, but only rank vulgarity, boastfulness and triviality. Van Hoëvell, who would make his name as a colonial critic, painted an extremely negative portrait of the regent of Cianjur whom he visited to pay his respects during his tour of Java in 1847. His host proved indeed to be a wealthy man. His palatial house was richly furnished in European style but 'with little taste, with large mirrors, paintings and sofas', which Van Hoëvell found 'nothing special'. He also met the regent at a reception at the house of the Resident. The chief was accompanied by his wife, an entourage of courtiers and servants, and the traditional eight dancers. The liberal clergyman's detailed description of what he witnessed was heavy with contempt (Van Hoëvell I, 1849: 23). The mixture of traditional and modern was typical not only of the regents but

Office of the Resident in Bandung. The seat of the Dutch colonial bureaucracy in the Priangan Regencies was initially in the Cianjur foothills but was relocated here in 1864. The building had, of course, to exceed the *kraton* of the regent of Bandung in magnitude and splendor (photo pre-1880).



Source: KITLV Collection

applied just as much to the district chiefs, who imitated the European way of life, wearing Western clothes and furnishing their houses with mirrors, hanging clocks, billiard tables and silver cutlery. 'You will miss nothing but the good taste', one liberal noted sarcastically (Van Soest III, 1871: 180). Veth spoke with similar disdain of the regent of Bandung, who had surpassed his rival in Cianjur in wealth and appeared in front of European guests in 'garments glittering with diamonds'. At receptions, courtiers would crawl along behind their lord on their knees, as he strutted along with his stick, hat, cigar-holder and spittoon (Veth III, 1882: 253) 'Too lazy even to carry his own *sirih* box' was the comment of one European who witnessed this display, on whom the finesses of court etiquette were clearly lost.[38]

38 This portrait would not be complete without drawing attention to the extent to which the privileged expatriate class had adopted local customs and styles. De Haan pointed out that 'no self-respecting pure-blooded Dutch lady would be seen without a servant carrying her *sirih* box. In elite circles, the women had adopted the habit of chewing *sirih* and blackening their teeth. One

The district head of Banjaran surrounded by his retinue of servants and officials. [Banjaran lies to the south of Bandung, at the foot of the Malabar mountain.] A *payung* is held above the *wedana*'s head to demonstrate his authority (photo pre-1880).

Source: KITLV Collection

In the nineteenth century the Priangan regents assumed the airs of minor princes who had to show respect to no native sovereigns above them, renamed their humble *dalem* a *'kraton'* and demanded that their clients pay court to them in the best traditions of the kingdom of Mataram. They showed their European masters that they had adapted to the demands of the modern world: they drank champagne, kept stables of racehorses, gave their sons an education and held official positions. Towards their own people, they tried to articulate their sacral-royal status. As in the Mataram period, or at least how it was portrayed, the hierarchical structure of native society in the nineteenth-century

visitor came across a member of Batavian high society, the wife of a former Director-General, on the back porch in sarong and *kabaai*, her hair loose, on a mat on the ground, surrounded by slave girls doing some kind of work or another, while the lady of the house was cleaning vegetables; next to her ladyship was a large silver spittoon, into which she would, from time to time, spit long streaks of blood-red *sirih* juice' (De Haan I, Personalia, 1910: 252, note 1). The sarcasm underlying this portrayal of the East Indies lifestyle of the elite in the mid-19th century must be understood in the light of the more bourgeois European lifestyle increasingly adopted by the subsequent generation of colonial officials and their families.

Priangan reflected on a smaller scale how the inferior chiefs paid homage to their overlords. It was a ceremonial ritual accompanied by great public displays of prestige and which appeared to have withstood the test of time. Hunting parties and tournaments showed how feudal the lifestyle of the native aristocracy had become while, in the eyes of the colonial officials, such behaviour simply proved how useless and superfluous the elite had become. The guests themselves paid for these lavish affairs, since they had to provide everything required free of charge. The regents assumed the right to lay claim to all the possessions of their subordinates. The moderation and kindness that early sources attributed to the lords in their treatment of the peasants was replaced in this revised colonial perspective by an emphasis on the regents as tyrants, exercising their power like veritable despots. The government had not succeeded on alleviating the misery of the people of the Priangan.

> Private ownership unknown to the native, not even over his wife and children, if the will of his chiefs came into play. (Phitzinger Report 1863: 146)

From this perspective, the chiefs subjected the people to an advanced form of subordination that left the latter no space to build up a decent existence. This critique was accompanied by the suggestion that the poverty of the peasants, if it existed, was caused by the fact that all surplus generated by their labour was expropriated by their lords. In 1861, in the magazine he himself edited, Van Hoëvell addressed a comment to Multatuli, intended not only to place the author in the camp of those who criticized the cultivation system but also entreating him to show some understanding for colonial officials, who were genuinely concerned about the miserable lot of the Javanese peasants. It was not they who were the root of all evil, it was the native chiefs who behaved with impunity. The liberal leader reserved his wrath for the chiefs of Lebak and their counterparts in the Priangan and he expressed his deep regret that Multatuli did not wish to see the Dutch government as an ally in his crusade against them. The dissenting author, however, pronounced sentence by accusing the government and the chiefs of conspiring to prevent the Javanese people from improving their lives. By choosing to fight his battle on a broad front, he incurred the displeasure of both the liberals and the conservatives at home.

From protectors to exploiters

The colonial authorities now openly expressed their suspicions that the native chiefs were not only unsuited to take responsibility for collecting the

tribute, but also put their own interests ahead of those of the government. The cultivation and delivery of coffee, lucrative as it was for them, was not their only – or even their primary – source of income. According to calculations by Resident Overhand in 1849, the regents had earned twice as much in the previous year from their share of a tenth part of the paddy harvest than from coffee. Of the total of 50,318 guilders that the regent of Cianjur earned in 1848, according to this official report, his income from the sale of paddy amounted to 32,368 guilders, he earned 500 guilders from taxes on the slaughter and sale of cattle, a further 2,200 guilders from the tax on *warungs*, and lastly 15,250 guilders from the cultivation and delivery of coffee. His colleague in Bandung, who earned a total of 86,524 guilders, made twice as much from coffee: 30,000 guilders. But his share of the paddy was also worth much more, at 51,224 guilders. The compilers of the coffee report, in which this overview was included, warned that the regents themselves has presented the figures, which did not include what the compilers referred to as 'unknown legal and illegal benefits'. In other words, the declared account of the regents' earnings was on the conservative side. The same applied to the statement of the average incomes of the regents between 1862-64 submitted to Commissioner Van Rees by Resident Christiaan van der Moore in 1866-67: 299,498 guilders. The regent of Bandung accounted for about half of this, while those of Limbangan and Sukapura had to settle for a meagre sum of a little more than 20,000 guilders. Besides these considerable differences between the chiefs, the strong fluctuations over time are also striking. These were mainly caused by good or bad coffee harvests and widely fluctuating revenues from paddy taxes. The only two constant factors were the great unpredictability in the pattern of incomes and expenditures of the regents and the colonial administration's lack of insight into their magnitude and composition. The uneasy feeling that the figures were arbitrary and concealed a hidden reality could no longer be avoided.

Van Rees confirmed this suspicion by determining that, of the total of 168,521 households in the Priangan, no fewer than 20,030 were exempt from colonial servitude. That meant that nearly an eighth part of the population was at the disposal of the chiefs for their own convenience. This substantial segment probably included not only the *rahayat*, the class of peasant-landowners that made up the entourage of the landed gentry, but also the *panukang*, who tended the chiefs' fields as dependent sharecroppers. According to colonial officials, the servitude of the peasants towards their lords was driven by the latter's love of ostentatious displays of prestige. The claims they made on the peasants' labour power served no productive

purpose at all. Exempting households from growing coffee meant the available labour was being underutilized, and that the volume of tribute was suffering at the expense of the chiefs' indolence. This interpretation, however, ignored the fact that the gentry persistently used this exempted category of peasants to cultivate land to grow paddy and thereby to increase their incomes. A government investigation into the land rights of the local population conducted in later years showed that *sawahs* were laid out by peasants providing corvee services in the regencies of Cianjur, Bandung and Sumedang until the second half of the nineteenth century (Eindresumé II, 1880: 32-5). Cultivating land at the initiative of local lords was undoubtedly the main reason for the emergence of large-scale landownership which gave the Priangan highlands the character of an agricultural frontier in the early-colonial period. The concentration of cultivated land in the hands of the chiefs increased as they took possession of holdings abandoned after their owners had left or died. There were also cases of owners being forced to relinquish their agrarian property (De Haan I, 1910: 368). The heavy burden that landownership entailed also facilitated its transfer to members of the higher or lower landed gentry, as they were exempt from servitude (Eindresumé II, 1880: 52). This source, which presented the results of the government's investigation of land tenure, confirmed that the landed gentry controlled a large share of the cultivated land, either through inheritance or in the form of fields which went together with the office they held. The fact that the fields were widely dispersed and were assigned to large number of sharecroppers concealed the extent of this large-scale landlordism. Because servitude was based on landownership and notables were exempt from this duty, the unequal distribution of ownership led in the long term to a critical shortage of compulsory labour.

While the government's attention was focused on the main export crop, the chiefs made every effort to expand the land used to grow food and to acquire as much of it as possible for themselves. Land registered in the colonial administration as belonging to the chiefs by virtue of their position had often in reality been expropriated from its original peasant owners and their descendants. The coffee report made note of this trend towards dispossession and how it had led to the accumulation of agrarian resources in the hands of the rural elite. The refusal of the lords of Priangan to give priority to colonial interests – the cultivation and delivery of increasing volumes of coffee by their subordinates – and the fact that they put their own interests first led to their final exclusion from governance. The earlier courtesy towards local chiefs increasingly made way for a coolness bordering on hostility, expressed through a growing number of complaints about

their misdeeds. This achieved such proportions that orders were issued from higher up for greater moderation in reporting the chiefs' misdemeanours (Van Deventer III, 1866: 323). The government took the opportunity offered by the regents' abuse of their power to present itself as the true benefactor and protector of the people's interests. They would do what the chiefs had failed to do: ensure that the burden of servitude was shared more justly and less unequally. In the contest between the government and the native chiefs over scarce labour, which had been going for a century and a half, the latter had stubbornly resisted the loss of their right to lay claim to the peasants' labour power. This is demonstrated by the persistent complaints of first VOC agents and then colonial officials about the insufficient distribution of obligations under the system of forced cultivation. That was the main reason for the abolition of the distinction between *bumi* and *numpang* towards the end of the eighteenth century and the replacement of the c*acah* formation by the *somahan*, the core household, as the basic unit for the tribute in 1839. The unequal distribution of the burden reflected the tradition of corvee services, where some classes of the population were heavily burdened while others were exempted and where available manpower was underutilized in general. The chiefs in the Priangan exempted many people from other obligations – including cultivation services – so that they could be used to advance the chiefs' own interests and prestige. As late as 1869, the Colonial Report noted that the Resident of the Priangan Regencies personally and in clear terms had to urge regents and district and village chiefs to assure a more equal distribution of corvee services.

In administrative jargon, the chiefs' manner of granting exemptions was designated as 'arbitrary'. Concerns were sometimes driven by a desire for reform, but more often by irritation with the fact that these practices withdrew valuable labour power from the system of colonial exploitation. The motivation for wishing to distribute cultivation services more widely was to improve production; since the time of Daendels, the focus had not been on combating the 'arbitrary' exercise of power by the chiefs but on making the collection of the tribute more efficient. 'Extortion' was another term that was popular in bureaucratic circles to describe a wide variety of counterproductive practices by native managers. It was undoubtedly a justified accusation with its roots in the fact that lower chiefs did not receive any form of regular reimbursement. They were in the service of regents or their officials, but received meagre payment for their efforts, inadequate to fund their lives as minor gentry. They were entitled to a third share of the *cuke*, which was collected at the source. For their involvement in the cultivation and delivery of coffee they had to wait and see what remained

for them after the cultivation commission had been paid to the regent. This was often very little or nothing at all. They made up the deficit with what were known in the Company era as 'hidden profits'. All actions that were inextricably and traditionally bound up with the native aristocracy were denounced as 'arbitrary' and 'extortionate'. From this perspective, good governance was seen as the task, even the apostolic mission, that the modern colonial government was expected to pursue.

> The whole society was autocratic, both in structure and attitude. Blind obedience and unconditional subordination to one's superiors had, through centuries of custom, struck deep roots in the hearts of the people. No wonder that, with this unbridled power on the one hand and almost boundless submission on the other, the Javanese lordly regime was not a powerful and benevolent autocracy but an unprincipled, unpredictable and often intolerable tyranny. A completely different spirit inspires the Dutch government. Its aim is to further the welfare of both Mother Country and Colony by creating and maintaining law and order. (Nederburgh 1877: 434)

The unpredictability, arbitrariness, abuse of power and other failings of which the native chiefs were accused must be understood in the light of the hierarchical structure of the colonized society. The way the regents exercised their authority was arbitrary by nature. They distributed favours and imposed obligations unequally, exempting some from servitude and demanding it from others, and withholding payments or meting out punishment as they saw fit. Chiefs, no matter how insignificant, were exempted from performing compulsory services for the government and when the substantial lower class of gentry were no longer able to claim this privilege, they were permitted to send others to perform their cultivation or corvee services in their place. The lack of precise instructions and rule to which subordinates could appeal was neither coincidental nor exceptional, but purposeful and systematic. The descendants of local chiefs told of punishments meted out in the past for not following orders. One particularly brutal taskmaster was the son of the regent of Cianjur, who as *kumetir* was in charge of coffee cultivation in the early nineteenth century (Inlandsche verhalen 1863: 293) But it could be worse – the regents would not shy away from murder as a form of punishment. In these accounts, it was the higher and lower chiefs who incurred the wrath of their lords, but they would have been equally as cruel in their treatment of the peasants. Justifying such excessive behaviour as traditional ignores that fact that it was to a

large extent the product of early-colonial rule. The regents in the Priangan lands were elevated to the level of rulers, since giving them greater power than they had enjoyed before was seen as a perfect way of guaranteeing the collection of the tribute, in the form of the compulsory cultivation and delivery of coffee. The policy of sedentarization, territorialization and hierarchization had confined the peasant population in an authoritarian regime and denied them any power to resist. In short, rather than perpetuating a pre-existing system of autocratic rulers versus submissive followers, the subordination of the peasants had been enforced with help from outside.

It is most certainly true that, according to the standards of the Dutch bureaucracy – or at least the modern-colonial interpretation of them – arbitrariness and extortion did occur. The question is, however, whether such practices were not also the result of insufficient control over the chiefs by the regents, and of the peasants by the chiefs. The 'gaps' in the system of colonial rule also occurred in native management: it was unable to close all loopholes and lacked the bureaucratic expediency to respond promptly and effectively to problems as they arose. The confinement of the peasants in the Priangan system did not prevent them from resisting the heavy burden imposed especially on their labour power. They did not engage in open or violent action against their lords or the alien rulers, but adopted more subtle ways to resist, such as evading their duties, sabotage and other forms of disobedience, which eventually brought the coffee regime to a standstill. There was certainly a lack of administrative efficiency and effectiveness in the Sundanese highlands. Making use of 'traditional' leaders and institutions to enforce the cultivation system did not lead to a system of perfect control but to one of compromise and striking the best possible deal. Coffee cultivation did not transform the landed gentry of the Priangan into a dynamic, let alone dynamizing, economic vanguard, but merely offered new, rich sources of income from which the majority of the peasants hardly benefited. To break through the stagnation that this brought about in the exploitation of the people and land of the Priangan, the colonial mission had to be reformulated. Governance at arm's length had to be replaced by more direct and close-up intervention by European officials, and the system of coffee cultivation had to be transformed into one that was also attractive to the producers.

The way in which this occurred will be considered, albeit summarily, in the following chapter. Here, my further argument focuses on the administrative reforms that were introduced in the Priangan Regencies and their ideological underpinning. The high-ranking official entrusted

with the reorganization marked this change of course by establishing that the Priangan peasant was by no means insensitive to the privilege of being free 'to do as he himself sees fit with his own will, his time, his labour, his family and his possessions' (Van Rees 1867: 60). This viewpoint tied in closely with the thinking of a new generation of colonial policymakers who, like their predecessors, were imbued with their beholden duty to show the people the way to progress and prosperity. Without careful guidance, however, the peasants – once freed from the burdens imposed by their native lords – would not be able to take this path under their own steam (Nederburgh 1877: 436). This facade of well-intentioned guardianship concealed scepticism and doubt on the part of the government. The long-pursued policy of indirect rule had failed to consistently increase the colonial surplus and improve the lot of the common people. Direct surveillance by colonial officials close to the base of native economy and society was considered necessary to achieve these noble objectives. It was considered obvious that exchanging the authority of the regents for that of colonial officials would be an improvement. But was this assumption necessarily true? In 1865, shortly before Van Rees embarked on his mission, the Assistant Resident for Cianjur was dishonourably discharged for cruelty to prisoners and improper treatment of native chiefs (Fasseur 1995: 271). It is significant that the good governance operation was conducted without Van Rees saying a single word about this unusual incident. Of course, the offence was discovered and the perpetrator punished. However, this well-intentioned explanation – offered by Fasseur – did not change the fact that the rotten apple had been removed without the whole basket being inspected more closely. Where the defects of the regents' authority were now scrutinized in great detail, white officials had to commit serious violations before they were called to order. I noted earlier how, as Assistant Resident in Sumedang, Kinder de Camarecq had solved a case of cattle theft by giving the 'offender' a public flogging. Despite the fact that his handling of the case was based on intimidation rather than factual evidence and that the victim barely survived his repeated beatings, this deed assured him the reputation among his peers, also retrospectively, of being a bold and resolute official of the old school (Gonggrijp 1919). Besides such wrongdoings and abuses of power, did the colonial apparatus not also contain other elements that were little different from what, according to the norms of modern bureaucratic governance, was considered so pernicious in the rule of the regents? Van Hoëvell himself referred to the bragging and flattery that was considered desirable behaviour in the entourage of the Governor-General.

> ... he is the sun, on which all eyes are focused; if he laughs, then everyone laughs, if he looks serious, the whole company looks serious, and if he is sad, then all those who approach him weep with him. (I, 1849: 9)

Douwes Dekker (Multatuli) and Vitalis were particularly vocal but also quite exceptional in bemoaning the lack of space for critical voices within the colonial apparatus.

The reform operation

The longer-standing intention to restructure regional governance started to take shape after the middle of the nineteenth century, on the basis of recommendations made by various past Residents. Their aim was to bring the administrative machinery of the Priangan Regencies more in line with the colonial bureaucracy introduced half a century earlier elsewhere on Java. What they disagreed on was the urgency of a far-reaching reorganization. After his appointment as a member of the Council of the Indies in 1864, Van der Wijck, Resident from 1855 to 1858, issued a report in which he stated in no uncertain terms that he considered the imminent reform of the administration and taxation system in the Priangan Regencies a highly risky undertaking. Current Resident Van der Moore was, however, a firm advocate of the need to change the regime by depriving the region's aristocracy of their far-reaching rights to self-governance. He felt strongly that the time had come to make a decisive change. Minister for the Colonies Fransen van der Putte sent a confidential letter to Governor-General Baron Sloet van de Beele on 25 April 1864 requesting him to 'urgently make a change in the Priangan system a matter of investigation'. On 16 June 1866 it was decided to entrust this important assignment to Otto van Rees who, after a successful career as a civil servant, had been appointed to the Council of the Indies. He was issued with the following instruction:

> to organize a mission to the Priangan Regencies, with the objective, after consulting the head of the regional administration and the Regents, of submitting definitive proposals regarding the question of changing the so-called Priangan system, on the same basis as that on which the other regions on Java are structured.[39]

39 NA, Ministry for the Colonies, Vb. 29 June 1870 A22/184e.

In 1866-67, Van Rees spent six months in the Priangan to acquaint himself with the way coffee cultivation was organized, how labour was mobilized and how the higher and lower gentry were involved. The investigation he initiated was limited to gathering the information he needed to support his recommendations. The decision to introduce radical reforms became the starting point rather than the conclusion of his mission. His resolute approach was illustrated by a meeting on 31 July 1866 in the residency capital, Bandung, to inform the heads of the five regencies of the proposed measures. Van Rees explained to them in plain language what they could expect to happen. The regents were not asked to sign the minutes of the meeting, to make sure they understood that their responses would be listened to but not taken into account. The message that Van Rees presented in his introduction to the meeting was that his respected audience did not have their forefathers to thank for their noble standing but the colonial authorities.

Van Rees submitted his report at the end of October 1867. The speed with which the architect of the reforms fulfilled his mission certainly had no effect on the thoroughness of his report. The depth of his argument is demonstrated by the fact that the first part of the report, which gave a detailed description of the history of the Priangan Regencies, was published separately shortly afterwards, with the permission of the government (Van Rees 1880). The second part, which contained four chapters (written by hand and covering pages 320-665), was considered too politically sensitive for general publication and disappeared into the archives. This part examined the working and impact of the Priangan system and discussed the proposed reforms, summarizing them per article. The fact that his findings, analysis and recommendations were kept secret made the public and political debate following the reform operation more difficult. The Dutch parliament was not permitted to see the report and the colonial policy-makers in The Hague produced an 'excerpt' which severely curtailed and toned down Van Rees' original document. Van Rees extensively discussed the development of the regime of forced cultivation in the eighteenth century as a consequence of the assumption that the peasants would refuse to grow trade crops of their own free will. In his opinion, the VOC tradition had remained practically intact in this part of Java. Recognizing that the cultivation and delivery of coffee was based on unfree labour and that the coffee planters sometimes had to be driven by force to the gardens, Van den Bosch had nevertheless suggested in 1834 that nowhere else in Java the people were as satisfied with their lot. After all, the government had never seen a single trace of unrest in the region. In Van Rees' opinion, this portrayal of the state of affairs was not reflected in reality. Pressure to increase coffee production had resulted

in a stock of 70 million fruit-bearing trees in 1856, the highest total ever achieved. The stock of trees had decreased again after this but, in 1866, 1,232 of the 1,432 *desas* that supplied labour for the coffee gardens lay at a distance of more than six poles from the plantations, so that the labourers had no other choice than to stay in the gardens during the five-month harvest period, living in demoralizing accommodation. Using language reminiscent of reports from a century earlier, Van Rees described how the people of the Priangan had been systematically exploited and oppressed. The fact that working in the coffee gardens did not entitle them to exemption from other forms of taxation only added to the injustices imposed on successive generations of Priangan peasants. Besides the share of the paddy harvest that had to be surrendered to the local chiefs and the clergy, there was a range of other services and taxes that the peasants had to provide as a consequence of their state of servitude. Nevertheless, the underpayment for the work they performed growing coffee over the years remained the greatest injustice. A typical feature of the Priangan system was the sealing off of the region to the outside world, to prevent both the 'illegal' export of coffee and the intrusion of Chinese tradesmen. The simple way of life of the mountain people had to be protected. Their labour power had to be reserved for growing coffee and they had to be prevented from using it for other purposes, apart from producing the food they needed for themselves. Cordoning off the region had caused a rise in the prices of basic necessities and, together with the heavy burden of labour – the market price of coffee was 40 guilders per *pikul*, of which the growers received only 6.5 guilders, the equivalent of a tax of 33.5 guilders per *pikul* – this sum exposed the inability of a large part of the population to meet their basic needs. Van Rees concluded that the price paid to the coffee planters should immediately be increased to the same level as that paid in other residencies.

The commissioner's report continued with a detailed summary of the tribute that the inhabitants of the Priangan had to supply to the colonial government and the local lords in money, in kind and in labour services. The main obligations imposed by the government were the work in the coffee gardens and the additional mobilization of unpaid labour for public works (or what passed for it), while the peasants also had to surrender a fifth share of their paddy harvest to provide the primary source of income for the local chiefs and the clergy. Van Rees did not fail to point out that, until the start of the nineteenth century, the share of the paddy that had to be surrendered was fixed at a much lower level – in the Priangan lands that came under Cirebon, it was no more than a twentieth part of the harvest – and had been raised by Daendels to a tenth part for the regents and a tenth part for

the clergy. The Governor-General had undoubtedly taken this decision on the assumption that this generous gesture would assure the loyalty of the secular and clerical elite, but it was hugely detrimental to the peasants and at no cost at all to the government. The legal basis of surrendering the compulsory share of the harvest to the local chiefs lay in the system of servitude that had remained intact in the Priangan Regencies. The 'inborn subservience' referred to in colonial sources took on extra significance in the case of households that belonged as clients (*rahayat*) to the entourage of an influential lord (*juragan*) or master (*dunugan*). Engagement in such a relationship of patronage meant that servitude to the lord – in the form of tending to his fields in exchange for a share in the harvest, as well as performing services in the house and the stables – exempted his clients from providing services to anyone other than the lord. The regents and local chiefs used this *ngawula* relationship to exempt their subjects as far as possible from the cultivation and corvee services imposed by the colonial government. The more significant this external burden became and the more the foreign rulers understood the workings of the peasant economy, the less the landed gentry were able to protect their clients against the claim on their labour by the government and especially their obligations to grow coffee. Despite this, however, Van Rees calculated that, in 1886 an eighth part of the total number of households – i.e. 20,030 – worked exclusively at the behest of the local chiefs. He himself considered this estimate a little on the low side. The five regents together had 3,788 households at their disposal, which were responsible for tending to the regents' extensive fields. The majority of the *rahayat* were therefore clients of the lower chiefs. To his observation that the relationship of patronage still existed, Van Rees added that there were degrees of servitude. Sometimes the entire population was obliged to provide unpaid services, while there was also a category (*tugur*) to whose labour the lords could only partially lay claim and who had to perform services by rotation. As far as the clergy was concerned, nowhere on Java were they as richly endowed with earthly goods and enjoyed such a high standing as in the Priangan. The members of the clergy did not form a separate class but were closely related to the local chiefs at the different social levels. They collected the shares of the harvest for them, made sure they were distributed to those entitled to them, supervised the irrigation works and were responsible for the agrarian calendar. The institution of servitude extended to the highest level of clergy. In 1864, head and district *panghulu*, mostly members of regent families, were together serviced by 3,561 subservient households, which were exempt from government services for this reason. Assured of high incomes and affiliated to the local chiefs,

the priest class enjoyed greater prosperity, influence and prestige than the mosque attendants in other residencies.

Release from servitude

How did Van Rees assess the impact of the Priangan system? He had nothing but praise for the excellent state of the roads and the ordered, well-organized main settlements (*negorijen*). However, he continued, the passing traveller did not see the less positive aspects of the system, which he attributed to the state of unfreedom in which the people had been forced to live for so long. Referring to early sources, he described the system's shortcomings. Progress had been held back by the chiefs expropriating all surplus and it was, in Van Rees' opinion, only the limitless submissiveness of the peasants that had sustained such a repressive system for so long. The root of the problem lay in the subordination of the peasants to allow coffee to be delivered to the government at the lowest price and the native aristocracy to live a life of luxury. The reform urgently required was to release the people of the Priangan from their subjugation and give them the opportunity to live their lives as they wished. Using data left behind by his predecessor Steinmetz – who had initially been entrusted with the reform mission but fell ill and died – he calculated how little the peasants received for their forced labour. One indication of the lack of progress was the modest increase in the population from 707,890 in 1837 to 882,354 in 1865, a rise of 24% in a period of 28 years. Moreover, Van Rees was inclined to attribute this higher number more to improvements in the greater precision of headcounts than to any real demographic growth.

A source of concern was that, in recent years, paddy production had not grown in proportion with the expansion of the area of cultivated land and the number of agrarian households. Van Rees noted that there was undeniably a link between the heavy burden of almost or completely unpaid services that the peasants had to provide and the falling productivity of land used to grow paddy. If the individual right to own land had not been retained in the Priangan, he believed that the peasants would have been in an even more miserable position. Van Rees then addressed the impact of the abolition of the *cacah* system in 1839. The decision had been taken by the Resident, without permission from higher up, with the intention of allowing more labour to be requisitioned to grow coffee. The social consequences of the decision were, however, not considered. It was concluded later that it had not led to redistribution of landownership; land remained concentrated

largely in the hands of higher and lower chiefs, the clergy, *hajis* and well-off landowners who were most likely the descendants of former *cacah* heads. Van Rees called into question whether the *cacah* configuration had indeed disappeared. It remained clearly visible in the spatial organization of widely dispersed settlements: *kampungs* comprising several hamlets, each housing a number of households, but lacking the compact enclosure and village governance structure found in *desas* elsewhere on Java.

The regents were accustomed to living like royalty. Van Rees correctly countered their objections to the proposed changes to the regime by pointing out that what they considered their rights had been invented by their colonial masters and that the privileges of their limited self-governance were now to be revoked. With this counterargument he was in essence denying that the power of the regents lay in adherence to tradition. On the contrary, both during the time of the VOC and later, granting a limited degree of self-governance to the native aristocracy in the highlands of West Java had been a political decision erroneously presented as a continuation of pre-colonial practice. In his report, Van Rees calculated what the chiefs had earned from their cooperation throughout the years. Certainly, their lifestyles were so expensive that they were deeply in debt. These debts contributed to their high prestige, but also made them vulnerable to deception, fraud, blackmail, corruption and other dubious practices. The figures Van Rees included in his report show that the chiefs' incomes fluctuated widely from year to year, that it was almost impossible to estimate the labour performed for them free of charge, and that the value of the coffee commission they received was often lower than that of the paddy they requisitioned and sold. In the report, Van Rees urged that the incomes and legal status of lower chiefs be improved. The practically unbridled power granted to the regents and their entourage denied subordinate chiefs at district and lower level all authority and capacity for resilience. In anticipation of the arbitrary nature of the orders they received from their superiors, lower local chiefs hastened to appropriate paddy fields, cattle and other assets and were then happy to be dismissed from service.

The large majority of the chiefs and their officials – 7,998 of a total of 9,114 – belonged to the lower ranks. Of the 1,116 supra-local chiefs, almost half (542) were higher-ranking officials – *patih,* (head) supervisors of coffee cultivation, head *mantri*, *kliwon*, *wedana*, *camat*, *petingi* – while the other half worked at the base of the native administration as scribes, gang bosses, market masters, guards, messengers, water supply supervisors, etc. The village administrations included 1,763 *lurah*, 2,876 *kobaijan*, *panglaku* and *tua tua*, as well as 1,078 constables (*pancalang*), a total of 5,715 officials.

A further 2,283 worked for the colonial administration as lower-ranking staff at government offices, warehouse employees, prison guards, postmen, clerks, native public prosecutors, *dokter jawa*, vaccinators, *prajurit* and their staff, foresters, midwives, *mandur*, postillions, teachers, etc. Some of these low-ranking officials, who were exempt from compulsory labour, received a meagre wage and they all lived more or less at the expense of the community, whose members performed household services for them and tended their paddy fields. Because they were paid so badly, these officials made up for what they did not receive from the regents and the government by taking what they could from the peasants. The same applied to the various ranks of clergy, who totalled 2,679. At the top of the religious hierarchy were five head *panghulu*, located in the regency headquarters, six head *kalipah* who acted as their deputies, 72 district *panghulu* and 99 district *kalipah*. This upper layer supervised 1,692 village priests (*amil* or *lebeh*), 169 precentors (*ketib* or *imam*) in the local house of prayer, 465 *mudin* who assisted at weddings, 96 *merbot* and *bilal* who beat the drums to call the faithful to prayer and 45 *jakat* scribes who wrote down compulsory contributions and voluntary gifts. Van Rees attempted to record the payments to the higher and lower priests but had to acknowledge that his final estimate was both very approximate and minimal. His detailed calculations were intended to show the total budget required to pay for the system of self-governance.

In the final chapter of his report, Van Rees left no room for misunderstanding about the urgent need for reform: freeing the population from the yoke of servitude that prevented the colonial government from fulfilling its civilizing mission and effectively addressing the development of the country and its people. The change of regime had to make the lower native chiefs pillars of public authority rather than slavish servants concerned only with enriching themselves at the expense of the common man. In the early nineteenth century, colonial policy-makers had already tried to curb the arbitrary power of the regents and restrict their abuse of their far-reaching powers. The British rulers focused on decreasing the distance between the European administration and the local people but, after Dutch rule was restored, the policy-makers had failed to bring the Priangan regents into the confines of good governance. They had no reason to do so, as the people were docile and produced increasing quantities of coffee for practically nothing. But behind the facade of self-government, the regents continued to strengthen their own influence and pursue their own interests. The idea of reorganizing the administration so as to curtail the abuses of their power by the landed gentry undoubtedly came up repeatedly. In a secret letter written

in 1840, Resident Hora Siccama had suggested cutting back the number of native chiefs considerably, to gradually introduce the land rent system in the region and to increase the price of coffee to the same level as in the rest of Java. His successor Cleerens denied, however, that the population was engulfed in poverty and resisted the abolition of the Priangan system. The colonial leadership's already minimal confidence in Cleerens dissipated entirely when his Assistant Resident Nagel was murdered in Bandung at the end of 1845. Cleerens was forced to step down and the regent of Bandung was removed from his post. It was a clear indication of the displeasure of the colonial government that, rather than appointing the regent's legitimate heir as his successor, they replaced him with an illegitimate son mothered by a concubine. It later emerged that the dismissed regent had been innocent of complicity and was entitled to be reinstated, or at least to have his name cleared. Behind the scenes, the discussion on a radical reorganization of the administration continued, fuelled by a memorandum written by Resident Overhand in 1849. With barely concealed sarcasm, Van Rees observed that the government could not in any case be accused of being overly hasty: 'If, after so many have acknowledged the need for improvement, it has not been put into effect after more half a century, there is certainly no question of undue haste' (1867: 577-8).

During his tours of the region, the government commissioner concluded that the proposed intervention would come as no surprise. News of the imminent changing of the guard had not been kept secret, right down to the peasantry, and Van Rees pointed out that it would be inadvisable to allow the state of uncertainty to go on for too long. The question was whether the proposed reform would have undesirable social effects. Former Resident Van der Wijck predicted growing unrest, but Van Rees did not share these fears. There would certainly be no resistance from the lower chiefs or the regents. The latter, placated with the promise of a fixed annual allowance, seemed – with the exception of the regent of Bandung – to have accepted in advance that they were to be relieved of their powers. The administrative reorganization, they had been assured, was intended to genuinely serve the interests of the native population. And how would the Mohammedan clergy respond? They would no longer be permitted to play a role in cultivating paddy or collecting taxes, or lay claim to worldly authority in any form, but, in turn, the government had promised not to interfere in religious matters. To compensate for their loss of income and influence, higher-ranking priests (head *panghulu* and *panghulu*) were also assured of an annual allowance for the rest of their lives. This material pledge proved sufficient to avert resistance from these quarters (Van Meerten 1887: 36).

Afraid to lose their power and certain that they would lose a large part of their informal income, the regents did make a last ditch effort to sabotage the reforms. Their henchmen started rumours to make the people afraid of the coming changes. The new land rent, to be paid in cash, would be higher than the value of the share of the paddy that the peasants had to surrender to local chiefs and the clergy. Furthermore, the system of private landownership that had always existed in the region would allegedly be replaced by a system of communal land tenure. Accompanied by Resident Van der Moore, Van Rees paid visits to the main *negorijen* and called together the village heads, local chiefs and their entourages to refute these malicious reports and to inform them of what was really going to happen: the peasants would be subject to the land rent regime, as was the case in the rest of Java. The reform, he explained, had no other ambition than to promote the welfare of the inhabitants of the Priangan lands by freeing them from the restrictive ties that prevented them from escaping poverty. In general terms, the reorganization would entail the following package of concrete measures:

– Setting the coffee price at the same level as elsewhere on Java. According to Van Rees, the government had a moral duty to take this step, which would mean that the Priangan planters would be paid twice what they now received.
– Abolition of the *ngawula* system, under which the peasants had to provide services to all those who were elevated above the common man by virtue of their office, birth or wealth. Recognizing this principle of subordination was incompatible with the civilizing mission that the metropolis in Europe had set itself regarding the East Indies. No one would be permitted, with the exception of the state – to lay claim to the labour power of another. This measure would be accompanied by a radical reform of the native administration, in favour of the minor chiefs.
– Abolition of the apanage or official ownership of land by chiefs, with the exception of village-level officials. Private landownership, which had always remained intact in the Priangan, was probably the reason why the gentry possessed so much land. A large part of that consisted of uncultivated lands used for hunting, but it also included the *sawah carik* or *kaprabon*, farmland that the local chiefs allocated to their clients for cultivation.

Dividing up the region, which covered an area two-thirds the size of the metropolis, would make it easier to govern. The plan devised by Van Rees included the formation of three residencies, sub-divided into twelve

sub-residencies and 63 districts, with a considerably higher number of European civil servants than had hitherto been the case. The compensation paid to the regents meant that they would not actually have much less than their average income over the past three years. This implied that the regent of Bandung would earn more than the Governor-General. Part of that was a fixed annual emolument of 20,000 guilders plus a personal allowance, while the largest part was a percentage commission on the coffee produced in their jurisdiction. Van Rees also drastically slashed what he called the exaggerated number of native chiefs and officials. Many were not eligible to be incorporated into the lower ranks of the colonial administration. The reductions largely affected the intermediate chiefs, *patingi*, *kliwon*, *umbul* and *priyayi*, who had no clearly defined tasks. They were appointed for political reasons and made up part of the network through which higher and lower chiefs exercised their authority – they would pass on the orders of their lords and report back on whether and to what extent they had been obeyed – but were not part of a well-defined line of command. Van Rees made a considerable effort to calculate exactly what the reforms would cost. It was clear that the budget for the administrative reorganization would have to be modest while, of course, he was notified that it should lead to higher revenues for the government, not lower.

VIII Eclipse of the coffee regime from the Sunda highlands

The dilemmas of political expediency

Initially the reforms proposed by government commissioner Otto van Rees were resolutely stonewalled at the highest colonial level. The Governor-General did not confirm receipt of the report and thank him for the dedication with which he had fulfilled his assignment until the end of August 1869, two years after Van Rees had submitted it. Why did it take so long? The pressure was off because, during the debate in parliament on the budget for the East Indies for 1868, the Minister for the Colonies had made it clear that he was not convinced of the necessity or urgency of the recommendations. He explained his hesitation by arguing that a system so steeped in tradition should not be abolished so lightly. His reticence was clearly fed by the difference in opinion among the managers of the colonial machinery about changing the regime. Governor-General Pieter Mijer used this pause in the proceedings to express his reservations about Van Rees' viewpoint and proposals in a memorandum to the Minister. A copy was also sent to Christiaan van der Moore, who was still Resident of the Priangan Regencies and a warm advocate of Van Rees' opinions, and to the Director of the colonial Civil Service. The discussion that arose in a small circle had to remain behind closed doors and when the documents were sent to the two senior officials, they were instructed not to make them public.

Governor-General Mijer rejected Van Rees' explicit conclusion that the poverty of the people in the highlands was due to the forced cultivation of coffee. In his letter to the Minister, the Governor-General held forth on the continuing and improving state of welfare in the Priangan as exemplified by increasing population and cattle stocks, a rapid rate of land reclamation, generally rising food production, and increasing sales of salt. In his categorical denial that the regime of unfree labour had resulted in the impoverishment of major segments of the population, the land-poor and landless classes in particular, Elson quoted from this letter of Governor-General Mijer as persuasive proof of the benign impact the system of forced coffee cultivation and delivery had made on the peasantry (Elson 1990: 34). This claim was, of course, diametrically opposed to what Van Rees had verified in the course of his investigations and those inimical findings were substantiated in rich detail in his report. With total disregard for the

uncomfortable evidence that Van Rees had brought back from his mission, the Governor-General accused the commissioner of having exceeded his mandate. He had been requested only to submit proposals for an administrative reorganization, a limited assignment that gave him no authority to make more far-reaching statements. According to the Governor-General, the main aim of the mission entrusted to Van Rees was to abrogate the authority of the local chiefs to participate in government and their collaboration in the collection of taxes. The abolition of the Priangan system was therefore intended not to release the people from their alleged poverty, but to introduce a system of governance that was already in place elsewhere on Java. Yet Mijer was unable to completely refute the critical report that Van Rees had presented to him. He had to acknowledge that the burden of taxation and corvee services was distributed extremely unequally and weighed heavily on the landless population (Memorandum from Mijer 1869: 17). While taking note of this appraisal, it is important not to forget that the unequal distribution of the tribute had been a condition for the Priangan system functioning so well throughout the years. Without exempting the landowners as much as possible and the higher and lower chiefs – together with the substantial entourages with which they surrounded themselves – completely, the system of forced coffee cultivation would have foundered much earlier in the face of mass resistance. It had always been largely the land-poor and landless peasants whose labour power was requisitioned.

The question that concerned the Governor-General was how the peasantry would respond to the abolition of servitude. For him, cutting the ties of their subordination to the native chiefs was much more of a political than a legal problem. He considered the possibility that the regents might appeal against this decision less important than whether those who had to pay the tribute would submit to the will of the government. How great was the risk that they would fail to comply with the changing system of taxation? The 'good faith', 'patience' and 'docility' of the common people had been referred to ad infinitum. Would they transfer their obedience towards their own lords to the colonial bureaucracy without complaint? It was not fear of resistance from above, from the regents, that caused the reform operation to take so long, but the danger that those at the base of the economy might evade their duties, that they would try to escape the burden imposed on them. Throughout this entire process, it was striking that European officialdom in the colony, and its impact on native society in the Priangan lands, had never been the subject of investigation. Van Rees gave it hardly any attention, while higher-ranking government officials displayed no desire at all to scrutinize their own role in the present or the

past. The Dutch parliament felt that it had been bypassed in the deliberations, which had taken place in closed circles. This mistrust was reflected in pointed questions to the Minister for the Colonies. Had the regents agreed to the proposed changes and how genuine was their consent? How had the clergy responded to the loss of their worldly power? Resistance from these quarters to the social revolution unleashed by Van Rees could undermine law and order in a region where the clergy as a class enjoyed greater prestige, power and wealth than elsewhere on Java (Van Herwerden 1871).

The task now facing the Minister for the Colonies was whether and how to continue with the reform operation. The silence that followed the completion of the government commissioner's mission had not gone unnoticed in the Sunda highlands. Van Rees himself was of the opinion that the people of the Priangan were impatient for the reorganization to start. This belief was strengthened by what his main informant Karel Frederik Holle told him. Holle, owner of a tea plantation, had befriended the head *panghulu* Haji Muhamad Musa from Garut and married or cohabited with his sister. He was the source of a series of reports stemming from native spokesmen to the effect that the lower chiefs and the mass of peasants interpreted the cutting of ties with the high-ranking aristocracy as a sign that better times were coming. The people were looking forward to the advent of the *aturan baru*, the new regulation. This welcome news, which was of course also passed on to the Governor-General, helped to break through the impasse. The Colonial Report for 1869 reported that both chiefs and subjects were well disposed towards the government and also praised the priests for their show of goodwill. Van Rees had gone to the Netherlands on leave in 1868 and was a member of parliament for a short time, but returned to Batavia in 1870 as president of the Council of the Indies. This honourable promotion, an upward step towards his later appointment as Governor-General, made clear that the lobby in his favour had come off best. The Minister for the Colonies mandated Governor-General Mijer to take the decisions required to put the proposals into practice. Decrees were published announcing the abolition of the Priangan system as of 1 January 1871. In protest against being by-passed and indignant about the sudden haste, parliament rejected the budget for the Indies. Minister De Waal resigned, on the pretext of bad health. Under his successor Pieter Philip van Bosse, the budget was approved a short time later and the Governor-General was given permission to start introducing the reforms as of 1 June 1871. And so the reform became a reality.

> The right to collect taxes, in cash, products and labour, until now left to the regents, as well as the general state of servitude of the native population

> to the chiefs and others of high rank or other persons (*ngawula*), are now abolished. (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees for the Dutch East Indies 1870: 122, art. 1)

The reorganization of the colonial administration now set in motion may have entailed an increase in European staff at public offices in the district towns, but they certainly no more than doubled in number. The new civil service apparatus in the Regencies comprised a total of 38 Europeans. As before, the lower ranks were reserved for native officials, who may have had little training and education but who also had to be content with a low wage. The government kept a detailed record of how much money the reorganization cost and how much it generated.

In a final report on his assignment submitted to the Governor-General in August 1871, Van Rees did not fail to praise the man who had been his most important adviser and source of information, Karel Holle. Impressed by Holle's intimate familiarity with the Priangan and its people, the Governor-General even wanted to appoint him as Resident (Janssen 1888: 25). This was no small honour for the now independent tea planter who had started his career in 1846 as a young clerk at the residency office when it was still located in Cianjur. However, Holle rejected the offer, but did allow Mijer to appoint him as honorary adviser for native affairs. As we shall see Holle, proclaimed 'friend and benefactor of the Sundanese people', played an important role in helping to bring about radical social changes from the hill estate he ran near Garut. Before examining this in greater detail, I shall first deal with the measures taken in parallel with the abolition of the Priangan system to alleviate the burden imposed by the forced cultivation of coffee.

A turn for the better?

The real crisis, as I argued in the previous chapter, was not caused first and foremost by the modality of governance that had been practised for so long. The system of forced cultivation ultimately foundered not because the regents were given responsibility for collecting the tribute, but because of the perpetual drive to increase the volume of coffee and the abysmally low payment received by those who produced it. Despite this draconic policy around the middle of the nineteenth century the government was unable to maintain the high level of coffee production in the Priangan, let alone push it up any further. The report on the inquiry set up to investigate the causes of the stagnation, which was included in the Colonial Report

for 1872, announced a radical change in how production was organized. The basic intention was to reduce the burden on the population as much as possible without losing sight of the importance of the cultivation and delivery of coffee for the sake of the treasury in the metropolis. For Mijer, it was unthinkable to abandon this overriding Dutch interest and many others agreed. This proviso of course reduced the room for manoeuvre in seeking a new method of colonial taxation that was less burdensome for the people while remaining profitable for the state coffers. The task of making this transition was assigned to three experts: Holle the tea planter, agricultural specialist Karel Wessel van Gorkom and D. Ples, Assistant Resident for Bandung. The first two were known critics of government control over the cultivation of coffee. As a man with practical experience, Holle had already outlined the conditions that had to be filled for a new approach to succeed.

The regulation the experts proposed intended first of all to increase the price for delivering the coffee, initially to ten guilders per *pikul* and a year later to thirteen guilders, the same as the rate paid to planters elsewhere on Java. They wanted to create a system of cultivation that would guarantee a tribute that was easy to collect, while also giving the people of the Priangan a source of sustenance and prosperity. The idea was that the planters should be paid a daily rate for their labour that was at least as high as what they earned from growing their own food crops. A radical measure was to relocate the cultivation of coffee away from the large, far-off gardens to land closer to the peasants' settlements. This essentially signified a return to the manner of planting coffee that had been employed in the very beginning: on small plots in the immediate vicinity of the villages. It also put a stop to the mass mobilization of labour. Strict compliance with the instruction that only those segments of the population obliged to grow coffee could be mobilized to do so meant essentially that the tribute applied only to landowners. As before, village chiefs and the clergy were exempt, even if they owned land. A further measure to alleviate the workload was reducing the number of additional trees that had to be planted each year to a maximum of 50. This was a belated acknowledgement that the norm of 1,000 trees a year established a century previously was far beyond the capacity of the planters. Lastly, the planters could choose themselves to which warehouse they delivered their harvest. By building local warehouses at many more places than before, from where the coffee could be forwarded to the main warehouses, the time and effort required to transport the beans could be reduced to a more acceptable level.

The package of measures designated as the new Priangan regulation (for coffee cultivation) came into force in 1872 and was extended three years later

to apply to all regions on Java where coffee was produced for the government. It was no longer permitted to plant coffee trees further than twelve poles from the homes of the planters without official authorization. The limit was first set at four poles, the maximum distance that the workforce could cover from home and back in a day in mountainous terrain, but this instruction was rescinded when it became clear that it would mean abandoning most of the gardens. The problem was also finding sufficient unused land to grow coffee close to the *kampung*. Where it was found, using it for coffee meant that the villagers had no reserve for growing food in the future. They lost what they had always had – the right to own and cultivate land that they had used off and on for a variety of purposes. What happened to the large plantations far from the settlements? A fair number of them, known as *merdika* gardens, were rented to local people with enough resources of their own to tend to the trees, pick the berries and deliver the beans to the warehouses at their own risk and expense and for the price set by the government.

When he stepped down from office in mid-1874, Resident Van der Moore concluded that the reorganization had been a great success. There had been no resistance from the regents, the lower chiefs received a decent reimbursement for the functions in which they had been consolidated and had strengthened their position, while the lower clergy had accepted their exclusion from worldly authority. The revival of peasant economic activity and trade showed how much progress had been made in general terms. He was also very satisfied with the prospects for coffee cultivation. The favourable effects of the new measures, documented in the Colonial Reports of the 1870s with the usual optimistic tone, proved however to be only a short-lived revival that lasted less than a decade and were by no means introduced with so few problems. As early as 1874, the Director of the Civil Service had to send around a circular letter warning against the tendency to reverse the meaning of the term 'voluntary'. Little came of effective monitoring by the government. Relocating the cultivation of coffee to small, widely dispersed plots of land made it almost impossible for the officials who were given full charge of the task of inspection to determine whether households were actually fulfilling their obligations. Now they no longer received a commission for the quantity of coffee delivered to the warehouses, which meant that they had no incentive to perform the services required of them. Moreover, the government's administration was still very unreliable. In short, the relocation from the far-off gardens to the villages did not bring the expected success.

It is not possible to determine the size of the harvest from the quantities that found their way to the government's warehouses through the official channels. Van Gorkom estimated that around half of the coffee produced

was sold off at a higher price on the black market and was never recorded in the official figures (1880a: 76). As before, smuggling was the order of the day and, now that the planters could deliver the beans where they wanted to, it was not possible to prove that they were trying to evade the obligation to deliver only to the government's warehouses. Theft also eroded the monopoly that the government demanded. One official who documented the many kinds of illicit practices included in his account a taste for coffee, which had become popular among the native population. In his view permitting the peasants to drink coffee as happened in some districts was a misplaced act of kindness as they had no real need to do so. He proposed conducting house searches to restrict this clandestine consumption (Esche 1891: 189). Policing was actually practised in several residencies.

> In Cirebon the people were not allowed to drink coffee. To lend this measure some force, after a harvest peasants' houses were searched for beans that might have been withheld from delivery to the warehouses. For a number of years the people of the Kuningan regency had to hand in all their kettles to the government. (Baardewijk 1994: 165-6)

Another colonial official reported that the peasants drank an infusion of coffee leaves, as they were not permitted to use the beans (Casembroot 1887: 21) We have already seen how, in the early 1820s, Resident Van der Capellen tried to maintain control over the transport of coffee with checkpoints, mobile patrols and spies. In his report, Van Rees spoke of security guards in the gardens to ensure that the planters did their work dutifully and did not slip off to drink coffee somewhere unseen. Such references created the impression that surveillance was successful, but the manpower deployed was insufficient to make it effective and, more importantly, the guards were themselves involved in fraudulent transactions. The coffee brought in twice as much on the open market than the price that the government was willing to pay. As Van Gorkom noted, this meant a potential profit of 100 per cent was disappearing into the state's coffers. According to this expert of long standing, it explained the disappointing results of what had been propagated as a crop benefiting the peasantry first and for all.

> The Priangan regulation has no *soul*; that soul is a reasonable price to pay for the coffee. The Priangan regulation is strictly speaking not a regulation at all, as it prescribes everything conditionally; in all its parts, there is room for manoeuvre. The core idea remains the same throughout: more trees, more profits for the state. (Van Gorkom 1880a: 75)

From the very start, the new Priangan regulation was founded rather precariously on two ideas: on the one hand, it had to assure the peasantry more freedom and more benefits from the cultivation of coffee while, on the other hand, the profits had to benefit the state coffers as much as possible. This formula clearly shows the incompatibility of the regulation's double objective: encouraging free cultivation but delivering coffee at officially fixed, low prices. Furthermore, the authorities were accustomed to a system in which all initiative came from higher up and all willingness to please from below.

A substantial and persistent fall in the volume of coffee delivered in the second half of the 1880s resulted in a new survey, the findings of which, together with a detailed summary of errors and problems, were included in the Colonial Report for 1891. One remedy that was considered was whether increasing the price to 20 guilders per *pikul* would raise the planters' income to 20 cents a day. The conclusion that this would not occur was accompanied by the comment that, during the more productive years of 1879-83, households earned three-and-a-half cents a day or less. In light of this discouraging observation, the verdict that abolition of forced cultivation was inevitable came as no surprise. The Resident of the Priangan Regencies, however, rejected the proposal, submitted as a separate recommendation, to replace the forced cultivation of coffee for the government by a state-regulated system based on free labour. He expressed his objections in the following words.

> With the system of free coffee cultivation practised by the natives, each planter works at his own expense and owns his own coffee garden. In the case of state enterprises, the natives will have to come and work for as wage labourers, with the consequence that the class of peasant farmers and garden-owners will be reduced to one of wage labourers and proletarians, living from day to day. It can never be the intention of a Government to turn the peasant cultivators into a class of proletarians, such as now exists in Europe on a large scale, and with which we have had the most miserable of experiences.[40]

One consequence of this policy reappraisal was that, in 1894, a scientific adviser for coffee cultivation was appointed, in the hope that his expertise would inject new élan into the production of the crop. However, Dr W. Burck

40 Annex TT1, annex C, 5.46, no. 15, Advies van de Resident der Preanger Regentschappen, p. 132, Colonial Report 1891.

was an expert in agronomic, rather than social and economic matters and his recommendations proved unworkable and unwelcome. He clashed with high-ranking colonial officials, took sick leave, and was then no longer considered eligible to resume his duties. In 1903 he was granted an honourable discharge and his post remained unfilled. He had tried in vain to wrest the management of coffee cultivation free from the interference of the regional bureaucracy. After he had left, however, a new Department of Agriculture was set up, whose responsibilities included coffee cultivation. This expressed the gradual shift from what had always been the task of the regular bureaucracy towards technical specialists. A wide range of modern-age 'experts' made their entrance, including surveyors to draw up land cadastres, consultants to advise on how to grow various crops, and engineers to supervise public works. They were operating from new official agencies and their arrival resulted in restriction of the room for manoeuvre that members of the civil service were equipped with or appropriated for themselves.

As Van Gorkom concluded in a retrospect (1918: 246), government-controlled coffee cultivation eventually went out with a whimper. The financial profit for the government, 50 million guilders in 1870, had shrunk to 11-12 million by 1890 and, when the system was abolished, to only a few hundred thousand guilders a year. The Minister for the Colonies finalized the decision in a bill in 1915. During the debate in parliament, he identified the opposition of the peasantry as the reason for the demise of the system, but admitted that this had partly been caused by neglect and errors on the part of the government. One member of parliament identified the cause more precisely as the fact that native planters were never paid more than 15 guilders per *pikul*, while the market price was three or even four times this amount. In his view, the system had failed because of the greed that had prevailed until the very end (De opheffing der gouvernements-koffiecultuur 1915: 302). Most commentators, however, did not lay the blame in the first instance with the colonial government, but sought the cause of the fiasco in the adverse behaviour of the coffee growers. At the start of the twentieth century, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies wrote that the people harboured a genuine hatred of growing coffee. Some high-ranking colonial officials advocated a return to the traditional hard-line policy. The Director of Finance, for example, called in a memorandum for the coercion of the native population to be maintained, restating a well-worn maxim: 'as much coffee as possible for as little money as possible'. Although neither the Governor-General nor the Minister for the Colonies explicitly distanced themselves from this official counsel, there was little political support for a return to the old regime (Proceedings of the States-General 1914-15: 775).

Van Gorkom believed that the native population did not refuse to grow coffee of their own free will from some irrational aversion, but because they were insufficiently led by economic incentives. They were driven by simple needs that could be satisfied without having to produce commodities for sale on the market. He therefore considered the exercise of force – including the 'soft' form of coercion concealed behind the mask of persuasion and encouragement – counterproductive.

This standpoint went by no means far enough for scientific adviser Dr Burck. He wished to see genuine consequences linked to the principle of forced cultivation. 'All forced labour must of necessity be properly organized so as to achieve the desired results,' he stated, succinctly. Leaving it up to the free will of the growers, to give them the space to decide for themselves, would erode the whole concept of self-driven peasant cultivation and defy the ambition of leading them towards progress and development. Burck agreed with Van Gorkom that the inability of the planters to act economically was the cause of the failure of free cultivation. They displayed typical 'slash-and-burn' behaviour, giving their immediate needs priority over longer-term efforts that would eventually bring in more profit. He argued that the same applied to food cultivation.

> If officials and chiefs are not strongly reminded on every monthly departmental reporting day, at every district, sub-district and *desa* meeting, to tend to their *sawahs* on time, to sow their seeds and to plant and weed the *padi* and secondary crops at the right moment, to make sure that the water supply is regulated correctly, etc., etc.; if all this is left to the growers themselves, the *sawah* cultivation would come to nothing, time and time again. If coffee cultivation is to become truly *peasant cultivation*, and that I have never doubted for a single moment, it will only happen if it is under the same management and control as *sawah* cultivation and that of secondary crops, no more and no less. (Burck 1897: 86)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial administration had finally penetrated to the base of the peasant economy and could now resolutely continue to practise its noble development mission.

Impact of the reforms on the peasantry

The reforms brought the isolation of the Priangan since the early-colonial era to an end. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the ban on

outsiders settling in the region or even passing through the Sunda highlands without the written permission of the authorities was no longer imposed with the same strictness as before. After 1853, Europeans were allowed to live in the main settlements in the regencies, as long as they did nothing that violated the rules of the Priangan system. The Chinese, who along with other Asians from outside the region continued to be banned from the residency, were granted a little more freedom of movement some ten years later. They were not, however, given rights to settle until after the administrative reorganization. The reform represented a change of economic policy. Arab and Chinese merchants not only took up residence in the main centres but also hung around the coffee warehouses, officially to sell all kinds of wares to the peasants who came to deliver their loads, but in reality to buy coffee from them at prices higher than the government's rate. The increase in the number of delivery depots made it difficult to prevent these illegal transactions. The presence of outsiders was no longer seen as obstructive and harmful but as encouraging the expansion of economic activity. The abolition of the pass system also helped increase mobility in the opposite direction: inhabitants of the Priangan would leave to seek a better life in Batavia or the *Ommelanden*, the lands surrounding the colonial capital. One consequence of this increasing contact with the outside world was the introduction of many new consumption goods. The landed gentry and native officials were the first to surrender to these temptations, which led to a change in their lifestyles. A few decades later, European products also proved to have found their way into the lives of the common village people (Economie van de desa, residentie Preanger Regentschappen IXa, OMW 1907: 81-2). By the start of the twentieth century, the Priangan could no longer be seen as an enclave where social life had been stifled. If the colonial ideology of limited needs had ever been based in reality, it certainly no longer reflected the economic behaviour of the population. To what extent can these dynamics be attributed to developments that occurred in the final quarter of the nineteenth century?

The first question that arises here is whether requisitioning more and more labour for forced cultivation was accompanied by radical redistribution of land ownership. The 1839 instruction decreeing that from then on all households would have to take part in producing and delivering coffee was intended to deprive peasant-owners of the possibility of binding the landless to them and utilizing their labour power as sharecroppers or farm servants. The landowning class would now themselves be obliged to perform the coolie labour that they were accustomed to allocating to their 'dependants'. In a more general sense, this perspective resonated in

the criticism that Van den Bosch, as architect of the cultivation system, had disrupted the structure of native society (Van Soest II, 1869: 127). In Chapter VII, I argued that there is no empirical evidence to support this view in the case of coffee cultivation in the Priangan Regencies. The repeated attempts in the first half of the nineteenth century to distribute the burden of cultivation obligations more widely did not lead to any levelling down of landownership. It seems justified to assume that very little came of the relentless attempts – already undertaken in the VOC era and continued even more resolutely by the directorate of the early-colonial state – to bring about radical change in the class structure of peasant society in the Priangan. Lastly Van Rees, who completed his report in 1867, noted that there was a class of well-off resident-landowners in the villages made up largely of the former *cacahs*, the heads of the composite households. It is not impossible – and even reasonable to assume – that more and more households were indeed involved in planting and picking coffee – including women and children – but there was still a difference in the level of taxes paid by the less and the better-off among them.

How was agricultural land distributed at the time of the administrative reorganization and the period that followed? During his village survey in 1856, Kinder de Camarecq established that Sembir had a total of 61 households and 73 *bahu*[41] of *sawah* fields. Of these *sawahs*, 26 *bahu* were owned by 17 peasant households. These were the heads of *cacah* households, but they were by far outnumbered by the 44 households of shareholders and farm servants. It had been impossible for many generations to expand the land under cultivation. Two-thirds of the total cultivated area was in the hands of higher or lower landed gentry: 31 *bahu* as apanage (*lungguh*), while 16 *bahu* belonged to members of the lower gentry living in the village who employed peasants to tend to their fields in exchange for a share of the harvest, as with the apanage. The fact that Sembir was not far from the district's main settlement may be one reason for the extremely unequal distribution of land in the locality. But even taking this into account, there is no way to ascertain that this situation had existed since time immemorial. Throughout the whole Priangan region, the landed gentry had managed to lay claim to a very large share of the land used to grow food. Another dimension of the aristocratic claim on landownership was the possession of expansive areas of wilderness by the regents, which they used for hunting. The plain along the Citarum river, for example, was the exclusive hunting ground of the regents of

41 1 *bahu* = approximately 0.7 hectares.

Bandung, where renowned stag-hunting parties took place (De Roo de la Faille 1895: 48). De Wilde noted as early as 1830 that these lands were held in reserve so as to deny the peasants access to them. The chiefs gradually abandoned their feudal pastimes and started to clear the land for more productive purposes. They used their ancestral heritage as a pretext to disguise the fact that they had, over time, appropriated fields that peasants themselves had owned. The latter cultivated land on the basis of their explicit right to lay out *sawah* fields on waste land that did not belong to anyone else.

The fact that the landed gentry were accustomed to appropriating land that originally belonged to the peasants came to light during the survey of the rights of the common people to agrarian property. The official responsible for conducting the survey among the peasants in the Priangan highlands emphasized that they were unresponsive in answering questions for fear of the chiefs. Directly below the upper layer of aristocratic landowners, a class of wealthy peasants evolved. The core was formed by former *rahayat* who, as the heads of composite peasant households, had been incorporated into the direct entourage of the regent families. When the higher-ranking chiefs lost their position as intermediaries between the colonial government and the peasantry, they became more independent and, as free agents, developed into a local elite of well-established landowners. The changes in the system of taxation that were an important part of the reorganization in the Priangan meant that the peasants were no longer obliged to surrender a fifth share of their paddy harvest. From 1871 this tribute, which was destined for the chiefs and the clergy, was replaced by the land rent, which had to be paid to the government in cash and was provisionally set at 3/20 of the estimated revenue of the *padi* yield. For the peasant cultivators this meant a substantial decrease in their tax burden. The immediate consequence was a rise in the market value of cultivable land, so that the price of both irrigated and non-irrigated fields rose sharply in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The commercialization of food agriculture had been given a powerful boost with the change of regime, which was reflected in the advent of usury in the village economy. The transactions of money lenders reinforced the ongoing trend of concentration of ownership of agricultural resources. The former owners continued to till the fields, but now as tenants or sharecroppers (De Wolff van Westerrode 1904). Above the common peasant class there now arose a new layer of mercantile entrepreneurs who generated income by using the labour power of others. Landlordism was characterized not by:

> ... large-scale holdings but collections of very widely distributed plots of land all with the same owner, each of which was managed as a petty enterprise, and which were only distinguished from the property of small-scale owners by the size of their landed assets. (Kern 1908)

These large-scale landowners embodied the mercantile capitalism that was also emerging elsewhere on Java. What happened to the apanage fields that the chiefs had appropriated? Strangely enough, Van Rees failed to make any arrangements relating to these domains after the transfer. It can be assumed that this was not from carelessness but for fear that eroding this vested interest might cause the landed gentry to resist the loss of their authority. The colonial bureaucracy displayed a striking lack of interest in investigating what happened to the former cultivated area held as apanage land. Frequently the descendants of the gentry enjoyed the usufruct of the fields, while sometimes they retained their apanage status and were used by the newly appointed village heads. In other cases, rights of ownership passed to the *panukang* who had tended the fields as sharecroppers in the lord's service. What certainly did not occur was that the landed gentry converted the land that they had held as *sawah kaprabon* into large-scale agricultural estates. Their landlordism was not production-oriented but remained mercantile in character.

During the period that the Priangan regime lasted, peasants with little land of their own suffered from generation to generation under the burden of their obligation to utilize their labour power primarily to cultivate coffee. Their tributary duties were so heavy that many were forced to get rid of their paddy fields, often paying the 'buyer' to relieve them of the extra work attached to their property. Right up to the abolition of the Priangan system, they continued to use the strategy employed by their forebears in the VOC period, to flee to other areas to evade the repressive claims on their productive capacity. But the administrative reorganization put an end to this tried and tested form of resistance to the heavy tribute for good. The cultivation ordinance announced in 1870 abolished the traditional right to cultivate the village waste land. The importance of this traditional custom was that it strengthened the negotiating position of the land-poor against both the landowning class in their own localities and supra-local lords. Clearing this land required no small effort. Preparing a dry field in the vicinity of the village for cultivation – often with no tools or draught animals and, above all, no assured supply of food while opening up the land – was an extremely difficult undertaking right from the start. Yet it was due to these efforts that the area of cultivated land expanded from generation to

generation. I will return to the impact of the ban now proclaimed on free access to waste land around the village and the considerations underlying it in the last part of this chapter. Suffice to say at this point that cutting them off from access to agricultural resources denied the landless underclass the opportunity of upward social mobility by taking possession of land not yet used by others and preparing it for cultivation.

How large was the landless agrarian population in the Priangan Regencies around the time of the administrative reorganization? Of the 108,816 households that lived from agriculture in 1860, a third possessed no paddy fields (Enklaar 1871: 134). Scheltema concluded a discussion of the progressive concentration of property at the top of the agrarian hierarchy as follows.

> … alongside the older form of feudal-aristocratic landownership, a new form of large-scale ownership emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century as the result of what is seen through Western eyes as usury, primarily by a class of *hajis* and other wealthy members of the population. (1927-28: 305)

In the light of this conclusion, it should come as no surprise that an increasing number of land-poor households were forced into a landless existence. From petty owners they became sharecroppers or agricultural labourers. Accumulation of landownership at one end of the social spectrum and a process of proletarianization at the other end determined the character of the peasant economy after the administrative reform. De Wolff van Westerrode reported in 1904 that the class of agricultural labourers were employed by their masters as attached farm servants. They lived in his household and, besides their food, they received a share of the paddy harvest. In the lower echelons of the village economy, the break with the past was less marked than seemed to have been the case at the top. The introduction of the village system now also in the Priangan contributed to this by exposing the tension between the forces of continuity and discontinuity.

Establishment of the village system

The decision by the colonial government to take over the governance and collection of taxes in the Priangan itself brought with it the necessity – as had already occurred elsewhere on Java – to designate the village as the basic unit for exercising authority. As I described in an earlier publication, the renowned village community on Java was not an age-old institution

but a colonial construction devised at the start of the nineteenth century to gain control over peasant production after the dislocation of the native aristocracy from the exercise of power (Breman 1979). My argument was based on a historical study into the way in which the early-colonial state requisitioned land and labour in the region of Cirebon. In this coastal plain of North Java, the colonial tribute was largely imposed on the cultivation of sugarcane. The introduction of the land rent system of taxation meant that the government designated the 'village system' as the focal point of its intervention at local level. The exclusion of the Sultan's role in governance in and around Cirebon led to village chiefs being designated as agents of the colonial overlords, charged with forcing the peasants to produce crops for export. From 1830, the cultivation system would establish this mode of exploitation on the island of Java and its people in more concrete form. Reliance on the village system was not introduced in the Priangan Regencies, nor were village chiefs ever elected, as the Resident stated in 1858. The native chiefs did not mobilize the people along territorial lines culminating in their domination of the peasant settlements as well-demarcated and integrated communities. In this region, the village was a *kaluruhan*, a collection of separate hamlets, small habitational clusters in which the *cacah* formation could still be recognized. Despite Daendels' order in the early nineteenth century to amalgamate them in larger, more concentrated villages, the habitat pattern in the Sunda highlands retained its scattered character. In Sukapura and part of Sumedang the people continued to live in small hamlets of four or five huts, usually about eight to ten poles from each other, until deep into the nineteenth century. In 1856 Kinder de Camarecq described the settlement of Sembir, near Sumedang, as a locality consisting of a *lembur*, the main *kampung*, and four hamlets. Another government official, Van Marle, described a similar pattern of settlement in Cianjur around the same time. The administrative reform brought this form of spatial organization, by then still different to that in the rest of Java, to an end. The decision by the regional authorities in 1865 to have the inhabitants of a *kaluruhan* choose a chief from among their numbers anticipated the designation of the village as the anchor point of government administration in the Priangan. The choice of local notables had always been the prerogative of native chiefs but, when the separate hamlets were consolidated into a single community, it was assumed that the village chief would be appointed not from above but by the villagers themselves. His appointment and whether he stayed or not at subsequent elections were decided in a democratic fashion that the colonial authorities tended to attribute to the 'original' village system. This 'authentic and age-old institution' was supposed to have faded away

after the intrusion of Muslim-based rule in the peasant heartland. In this reconstruction of a past that never existed, the community itself selected a number of prominent figures to represent the interests of the other villagers. Sidelining higher chiefs was interpreted as restoring a situation that had existed in the remote past. The colonial authorities professed not to interfere in the election of the *desa* chiefs. The landed gentry continued to exercise influence on local affairs behind the scenes for a long time and saw to it that no candidates were appointed who might harm their interests, especially their land and the proceeds it generated. What happened in reality was that local power was concentrated in the hands of a narrow upper layer of village society, consisting of former *cacah* heads, who had been pillars of support for the regents in the peasant landscape. They were part of a social vanguard that could now afford to promote their position and interests more actively. In accordance with standing practice, the village chiefs and other members of the village administration were allocated apanage fields from the cultivated land considered to be the joint property of the community. These fields were tilled by *panukang*, who were registered as sharecroppers of the local elite.

The investigation instigated to decide on the land rights of the native population showed that, after the reforms had been introduced in the Priangan, the number of chiefs in the newly formed village communities was exceptionally large (Eindresumé III, 1896: 190). Having said that, it should be noted that, during the administrative reorganization, Van Rees had abolished a large group of officials who acted as intermediaries between the regents and the people. In official documents they were described as a parasitic administrative layer of influentials, who had no place in the new model of colonial governance. In the course of time the colonial authorities had increasingly forced the native chiefs into a tighter organizational straitjacket, giving them specific tasks and competences that, despite being intentionally kept vague, did not overlap and were functionally separated from each other in a vertical ranking. In short, as well as being organized along territorial lines, the exercise of power by the chiefs was also strictly hierarchically streamlined. The reforms and the new rules revealed that a large number of figures had become superfluous because the interaction between the lower and higher echelons now took place on the basis of administrative expediency. They no longer fitted in the new configuration based on what the colonial authorities essentially saw as a duality between the nobility in and around the regents' court and the peasants in the villages, with an elongated corps of native officials liaising between them. This particularly applied to the large group of intermediaries between

district officials and *desa* chiefs, who were known by a staggering variety of names in different parts of Java: *lurah, kuwu aris, penatus, bekel, glondong, panglawe, mantri, patinggi, palang, panglaku, pancalang, demang, bahu aris, patinggi aris* or *priyayi* (see Davelaar 1891). Kinder de Camarecq reported that the higher native officials were formerly referred to as *priyayi*. These intermediate chiefs owned *padi* fields in all the villages under their jurisdiction and also had the use of messengers, *kebajan*, who provided them with a variety of services as ordered. There was great uncertainty about who appointed these intermediate chiefs and what exactly their competences were (Breman 1980: 15-21; see also Mulherin 1970-71).

In a system of governance based on lines of territoriality, these intermediaries were no longer useful, but a hindrance. Their exclusion from governance was formalized in 1840 when the Resident of the Priangan Regencies announced that forthwith he himself would appoint all officials lower than the district chief, rather than leaving it to the regent – a decision that he was not authorized to take (De Klein 1931: 86-7). Although this led to little change in practice, it was a new step that heralded the erosion of the power of the native authorities. This was followed a few decades later by the formal abolition of the intermediate heads. The decision was taken after the Council of the Indies had published a memorandum in 1864 criticizing the ease with which the number of intermediate chiefs had been allowed to increase under the cultivation system. Such minor chiefs or headmen may have constituted the continuation of an old native institution, but that was not considered sufficient argument to preserve them. The native administration had never been shy of increasing the number of chiefs, who all lived at the expense of the peasantry, and this abuse had reached unprecedented levels. The time had now come to remove them from their privileged positions. When the recommendations of the Director of Cultivation and the Residents all pointed in the same direction – abolish the intermediate chiefs – the Governor-General took the same view. Vacant positions would no longer be filled, while dismissed chiefs would receive no reimbursement for the services they had rendered. They had, after all, never been formally recognized in the posts they held and were therefore not eligible for compensation. It was illustrative of their somewhat elevated status that they held apanage fields in all of the villages under their jurisdiction. Higher-ranking chiefs who were consolidated in their positions, such as *wedana*, who were given charge of a district, were transferred to the government payroll. Interestingly, the pretext for expelling the lower class of gentry from their role as intermediaries was that their involvement in governance was contrary to the wishes and interests of the people as

a whole. It was a continuation of the attempt to abrogate and send that segment of the minor aristocracy that was not incorporated in the regular bureaucracy back into the peasantry and put a stop to their involvement in the administration at supra-local level. No account was taken of the fact that these go-betweens were of great significance in the exercise of power by the Priangan aristocracy. They, of course were not prepared to allow themselves to be declared redundant in the new order and simply be sidelined. The survey of land rights established that these figures indeed descended back into the peasantry but continued to be identified as *sentana* (Eindresumé III, 1896: 190). On the basis of their former status they were integrated into the class of peasants although treated as before with esteem. They retained their previous rights, such as apanage land and exemption from government services.

A more cumbersome bone of contention was no longer tolerating the interference of the clergy in worldly affairs, in particular in fixing the agricultural calendar and collecting the agrarian taxes. The voluntary donations from the peasants (*zakat*) fell to half what they had collected under the previous compulsory system (Verslag uitkomsten der reorganisatie van het gewest 1874). Outside the Priangan it was rare for the priest class to play a prominent role in regulating the production of food, constructing water supply systems, and keeping land records. Daendels had allocated these tasks to religious leaders in the Sunda highlands in the early nineteenth century, rewarding them with a tenth share of the paddy production. That meant a considerable increase in the burden on the peasants. The measure illustrated the strong position that Islam enjoyed in the area, even at that early stage, and which was probably the result of the support its expansion received from the native chiefs. In his report, Van Rees quoted a source from 1808 critically examining the piety of the regent of Cianjur and referring to the clergy as a plague on the people. In the decades that followed, Islam's influence over the whole region increased, resolutely facilitated by the involvement of higher and lower mosque officials in a wide range of bureaucratic activities entrusted to them under the ultimate responsibility of the chiefs. They were prepared for their tasks by being educated in *pesantren*, boarding schools offering religious instruction which Van der Capellen had already referred to earlier. Even before the end of the eighteenth century, several regents' sons requested permission to go to Mecca, which the colonial authorities only granted with the greatest reluctance. From the mid-nineteenth century, the number of pilgrims to Mecca reached unprecedented proportions, even though the costs meant that only better-off peasants could contemplate

making the journey. If a *haji* was not already seen as a notable figure in the community before the pilgrimage, he was certainly admitted to their ranks on his return. The religious desire to go to Mecca was reinforced by the knowledge that returning pilgrims were exempted from corvee services. For a long time, the government was not generous in issuing passes to make the pilgrimage and, after 1825, asked 110 guilders for the privilege. When this strict requirement was abolished in 1859, the number of pilgrims rose exponentially. Only 71 in 1850, numbers rose to 2,152 in 1857 and to nearly 5,000 in 1862. Croockewit described this growth in the number of pilgrims as 'frightening'. With the danger that threatened from these quarters in mind, countermeasures were not long in coming. Despite pious counter-propaganda, instigated by tracts which Karel Holle wrote and circulated, it proved impossible to rein in this wave of religious fervour. Just like the low-ranking chiefs, behind the scenes the clergy continued to perform the tasks that had long been entrusted to them. There was often no one else to perform the duties that had been taken away from them, while the village authorities now had the task of keeping the comprehensive local records. A survey of a *desa* in 1869 revealed that sixteen registers had to be permanently kept up to date. In addition, the villagers had to acquire certificates, passes or permits to do something, or not to do it. Every year, 600 pages of village records had to be kept by hand (Nederburgh 1877: 429-30).

The clergy were among the few who could read and write and these skills were indispensable in interacting with the colonial authorities. It was only when scribes began to appear in villages in the Priangan that the district chief had a local point of contact for the administration (Eindresumé III, 1896: 225 and appendix OO: 178), but for a long time it was the village priest who fulfilled this need. Disputes about land had to be settled in clerical courts, a tradition that did not change. That the higher-ranking clergy also failed to withdraw into religious contemplation and retained their interest in more worldly matters became apparent in the early twentieth century when it emerged that the head *panghulu* of Cianjur was the largest moneylender in the region; he loaned out his business capital, estimated at 200,000 guilders, at an interest rate of 30 per cent (De Wolff van Westerrode 1904: 71). The government was afraid that strengthening the religious feelings of the population might stir up political unrest, a fear that later events proved to be well-founded. Van Rees' recommendation that state and church be kept strictly separated should be understood against this background. The government decided not to interfere in the religious life of the common people but also wanted to put a stop to the administrative

services that the clergy performed under the authority of the chiefs. Just as the Priangan reform did not immediately put a stop to the authority of the native chiefs, the clergy continued – perhaps more persistently and with more subterfuge – to have a great influence on the people. Being able to read and write not only made the priests indispensable for the village administration, they also used that knowledge in giving religious instruction to adults and children. Throughout the whole region, but especially in the eastern part of the residency, the number of houses of prayer and *pesantren* increased strongly. The close ties between society and religion could not of course have escaped the attention of the government, but the latter considered it inopportune to devote too much attention to the matter in the hope that it would have no political side effects. This hope would later prove futile, when religious movements evolved in the Priangan which found a massive following. The government was particularly concerned about Islamic religious fervour combined with political motives. In 1871, for example, a ten-year-old girl and her parents were arrested in a village in Garut after a picture of Dipanegara had been found in their house. The colonial authorities acted resolutely against any such expressions of proto-nationalist sentiment.

Shifting the onus of servitude

One important aim of the reform operation was to bring to an end the *ngawula* system that had held the peasants in servitude to their lords. Van Rees' observation that the regents had succeeded in keeping hidden no less than one-eighth of their subjects – mainly from the better-off class of peasants – as clients to be used for their own purposes rather than for colonial corvee duties, illustrated that the government did not have complete control over the productive capacity of the Sundanese peasantry. Stripping the chiefs of their authority and imposing strict limitations on the size of their entourage were of course a precondition to sever the ties between the lords and their peasant clientele, but did it cause a breach in their relationship of servitude? To a large extent, this was indeed the case as the most important chiefs no longer had direct control over their former clients. They retained their prestige but now rarely left the *dalem*. For the lower lords, up to the rank of district chief, the situation was different. Appointed as civil servants in regular colonial service they could no longer allow their self-interest and desire for prestige to take precedence. Whatever they did, or failed to do, was now in the name of the government.

The village system did however have one aspect that retained a link with the old situation: the *ngawula* system lingered on at the level of the village community. The local influentials elected as *pamong desa* were allocated apanage fields and *panukang* from landless households to tend to them (De Klein 1931: 126). That signified a continuation of the master-servant nexus at the foot of the peasant economy. Admittedly, it was no longer the organizational principle of the larger social order in the Priangan Regencies, but continued to be practised as a local-level relationship structuring in particular the interdependency between landowning and landless members of the village community. The decision to anchor local government in the Priangan in the *desa* system came at a time when many commentators were posing critical questions about the policy that the peasant settlement should be seen and preserved as a self-managing community. This reappraisal was inspired by the growing awareness that the village elite did not necessarily act in the interests of their colonial bosses.

> The government, for example, wants a chief who will represent the interests of coffee cultivation, but the inhabitants of the *desa* prefer one who does not care about the coffee gardens. (Nederburgh 1877: 444)

Besides the problem of too many 'free riders', who were allocated apanage fields without doing anything to earn them and who did little or nothing to contribute to fulfilling the community's obligations towards the government, there appeared to be, behind the image of a close-knit community whose members felt intimately tied to each other and worked together for the common good, a completely different reality. Undoubtedly, scepticism was long allayed with the suggestion that the ancestral institution had been derailed by negative influences from outside. But it was not possible to maintain for long the myth that outsiders were to be blamed for the reported factionalism and abuse of power. Where the emphasis had previously been laid on the social cohesion and communal consensus of the inhabitants, the divisions between the various classes at local level now came more to the fore. The discussion focused on the election of the village chief. Should the villagers be given a free hand and was it advisable to appeal to tradition and adhere to a periodical change in *desa* leadership if, from the perspective of good governance, a permanent appointment seemed more attractive? The alternative was for the government to put a stop to the fiction of the 'freely elected village chief' and appoint someone themselves. This step would, however, have its price. This official would be entitled to a salary, estimated to come close to an outlay of ten million guilders a year

(Nederburgh 1877: 462). Good governance was important, but should not cost too much. Adhering to the fiction that the *desa* was led by someone chosen by his fellow villagers without undue interference from outside had the great advantage that the community would continue to bear the cost. This situation would remain unchanged until the end of colonial rule. Furthermore, Nederburgh added to his cost-benefit analysis, European authority had now penetrated to the foot of peasant society and would no longer tolerate the *desa* management engaging in usury and blackmail. The village chief and his associates, together constituting the village council, remained but would henceforth perform their duties under the strict but just surveillance of their Dutch controllers.

The *desa* system was under pressure from two sides. Although its room for manoeuvre was rigorously hampered from above, perhaps even more significant were the dynamic forces that undermined communal unity and consistency from within. In his account, Nederburgh devoted considerable attention to the erosion of the corporate basis of the peasant order. This was the consequence of a process of social emancipation. He argued that a powerful and closed village system evolves in a relatively undeveloped stage of society, when the inhabitants of a community depend on each other for protection and support. They are prepared to sacrifice their freedom, and respect and obey the leadership of the settlement. But if the power of the state increases and it treats its subjects justly and fairly, as happened under Dutch rule, then

> ... the dessa system is no longer strictly required to guarantee the security of individuals. Many begin to experience the ties with the dessa community and the guardianship of the dessa leadership as cumbersome. They hanker after distribution of communal property, individual enjoyment of commonly held goods and personal freedom. (Nederburgh 1877: 438-9)

In drawing up the balance, the Resident concluded with satisfaction that the Javanese people were on the right track and were moving forward along it slowly but surely. The desire for freedom that was signified by the dissolution of the *desa* community must of course not be achieved at the expense of the rights and interests of the colonial state.

And this was where the whole fable faltered. As the native people moved forward along the road to development, they were under strict surveillance and soon found themselves frustrated in their progress by the services the government required them to perform. The attempt to abolish the servitude of the peasantry to the native aristocracy did not change the fact

Ferry on the Citarum river near Cianjur. A Dutch civil servant is waiting with his carriage for the crossing. He is accompanied by a *panghulu*, a high-ranking religious official who is in charge of the district mosque (photo pre-1880).

Source: KITLV Collection

that it was maintained in the exercise of colonial power and authority. This applied first and foremost to the behaviour that Dutch officials expected of their inferiors. Just as the regents would surround themselves with an entourage whenever they left the *dalem*, the Resident, Assistant Resident and *controleur* would be accompanied by native civil servants on their tours. And not only to act as interlocutors and interpreters where necessary, but to make the differences in rank clear by their presence and body language. The lack of familiarity between Javanese and European officials that Nederburgh referred to was not in the first place due to their different positions in the hierarchy. The Western officials may have had more power but their Javanese counterparts were better equipped to interact with the native population.

> If the Javanese, by nature indolent and slow, are spurred on by an energetic and irascible European, they become bewildered, while Javanese chiefs know and understand only too well the sluggishness of the common man, as they too are averse to haste and act completely according to

> their nature, winning over the inherent slowness of their subordinates with patience and by continually cajoling them and leading them in the right direction. (Nederburgh, 1877: 409)

The European officials had a whole retinue of their own, including messengers, guards and coachmen. On top of these came the household servants, the number of which varied depending on the rank of the patron. Their service to their master was an expression of his standing, his right to prestige. It remained customary to summon villagers from far and wide to take their turn to perform corvee services for the convenience of the Governor-General. Again, this was no different to what the regents were accustomed to do. The colonial officials had adopted ways of acting and interacting that they had not brought with them from Europe but had their origins in the mannerisms of the Javanese and Sundanese aristocracy. Stripping the Priangan regents of their 'traditional' powers was accompanied by growing criticism of the arbitrary and extortionate ways in which they exercised their authority. Yet, when European officials engaged in similar practices, even if they were punished, the matter was settled behind closed doors and there was rarely any public discussion. Colonial servitude was more than just a personalized arrangement. It was enmeshed in the institutional setting of colonial rule. Corvee services were the name that the government used to justify the widespread mobilization of tributary labour. Many of these unpaid labourers were used to uphold law and order. Posting guards along the main roads made it easier to maintain surveillance of all traffic. Travellers who experienced problems with their transport en route were pleasantly surprised when a group of locals appeared from nowhere and pushed their carriages uphill or repaired a broken wheel as quickly as possible so that their delay was kept to a minimum. The villages acquired guardhouses from where conscripted sentries took their turn to conduct nightly patrols and sound the alarm if they encountered anything out of the ordinary. In this way, the colony turned into a night-watch state. In addition to law and order, the government also considered it important that the peasant landscape was kept neat and tidy. Travel reports are full of praise about the neatness of the main settlements and villages.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, it had been an altogether different story. Van Sevenhoven, the first Director of Cultivation, had described the peasant settlements on Java as shabby and completely without order, making them easy targets for all kinds of wandering reprobates. The houses were set far apart and he found the scattered clusters of hamlets messy and uncared for. He wanted to change that by designing the peasant habitat

A *gardu* (watchhouse) alongside the road on the outskirts of Batavia. Since the time of Daendel's authoritarian rule, each village in Java had to be guarded at night by watchmen to ward off danger and raise the alarm by beating the drum hanging at the entrance (photo pre-1880).

Source: KITLV Collection

according to a fixed pattern: in a square, with gated access to the fields, which could be closed off and guarded, the houses built in rows, bordered by a main alley and crisscrossed by narrow paths, with a hedge, moat or stone wall encircling the whole settlement. This upgrading and cleaning up of the peasant abode would instil a feeling of community among the villagers and keep outsiders at a distance (Van Sevenhoven 1840). He clarified his noble intentions with a model village plan contrasting the situation as it had been and would now become.[42] The design he made demonstrates a well demarcated regularity in a way that would make it easier to exercise law and order and achieve what had so far eluded the colonial authorities:

42 See colour plates VI and VII. The maps comply so closely with Van Sevenhoven's plan for improving the peasant settlements that they could have been drawn at his instigation. However, I did not find these drawings in the National Archives with his 1840 memorandum but with the documents relating to the draft of the cultivation act of 1863. NA, Ministry for the Colonies, Van Alphen-Engelhard collection (1896 and 1900), 363.

to frame the exact size of the habitat and allow for a reliable headcount of the population. Just as the coffee gardens had to be neat and tidy to facilitate inspections, the peasants' houses also had to be neatly arranged and easy to oversee. In his design for the model village, Van Sevenhoven juxtaposed the settled peasants – who behaved decently and properly – against an underclass that had completely gone astray and therefore posed a threat to public safety. The latter used to roam around in the wide vicinity and were suspected of clinging to their footloose existence to evade the reach of authority. In the colonial mindset, vagrancy was synonymous with lawless. In the eyes of the architect of this plan, permanent settlement in the village would promote sociability and strengthen community feeling.

In its efforts to gain some grip on the lives and work of the population, the government employed the method of counting and measurement. James Scott called this unrelenting desire for classification 'state simplifications'.

> These typifications are indispensable to statecraft. State simplifications such as maps, censuses, cadastral lists, and standard units of measurement represent techniques for grasping a large and complex reality; in order for officials to be able to comprehend aspects of that ensemble, that complex reality must be reduced to schematic categories. The only way to accomplish this is to reduce an infinite array of detail to a set of categories that will facilitate summary descriptions, comparisons, and aggregation. (Scott 1998: 77)

But the regime of registration in which the colonial authorities excelled was also intended to impose social order and discipline wherever it was lacking. The attempt to confine the workforce in the coffee gardens and the peasants in the village was seen as part of a mission to elevate native society to a higher plane of civilization. Ever since Daendels the authorities had tried to concentrate the population in more compact and manageable settlements so as to keep them under constant surveillance. In the Priangan Regencies, the habitat pattern continued to be widely dispersed, but here too the colonial administration had insisted that the *kampungs* be tidied up. In the same way that planting the trees in the coffee gardens in neat, regular rows and erecting a fence around the whole garden facilitated surveillance of the planters, the villagers were ordered to plant hedges around their yards, gravel the paths and fit gates at the entrances to the localities. In his report, Van Rees noted the excellent state of the roads, adding that he had never seen 'such neat and regularly constructed settlements as those in this region' (1867: 57). A separate official, the *camat gunung*, was

given responsibility for keeping the village clean and had the authority to put those who refused to cooperate in the sticks (De Klein 1931: 85; see also Oosterzee 1882: 394). For a century and a half, first the agents of the VOC and then the government's officials had persisted in the belief that the peasants had plenty of time on their hands. That assumption was reflected in the ease with which the colonial authorities imposed obligations of servitude, in the firm conviction that there was no need to pay for them. The accusation that the native people failed to behave economically applied in reality to the directors and management of the Dutch enterprise. This even resulted in the Governor-General issuing a circular in 1847 ordering that 'all work that served no purpose or only for decoration or ornamentation and which kept the people from their agricultural tasks should be avoided at all costs' (Circulaire nuttelooze arbeid 1852: 295). This clearly did not help, as a *Gids voor de Controleurs bij het Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, drawn up in 1878 by Chief Inspector for Cultivation Van Gorkom, repeated that mobilizing labour just to make the coffee gardens appear neat and tidy was inadmissible.

Besides the fact that corvee labour had to be provided free of charge, this also had to occur in a way that expressed the subordination of the native population and their great respect for their European superiors. The obligation to servitude had not disappeared but was imposed directly on the people by the colonial administration. The change that had taken place in the Priangan, the substitution of obedience to the native chief to direct subalternity to the government and its officials was not the subject of criticism, or even of discussion. The passage below illustrates this deferential behaviour, adding that this spirit of subordination guaranteed the preservation of the established order.

> It is striking that, as soon as one has passed the borders of Bogor, the natives not only greet Europeans but usually go and sit at the side of the road; if you encounter a man on a horse, he will immediately dismount (this is incidentally the custom throughout Java), while women generally avert their faces. Although such displays of subservience appear a little exaggerated to me, I am of the opinion, taking the small number of Europeans into consideration, that there are many advantages accrued to this show of docility, and that it would be politically inopportune to completely suppress it among the natives. (Croockewit 1866: 312)

The eclipse of the native chiefs in the Sunda highlands as part of the good governance operation was conducive to the transition to what Scott called

'high modernity', an administrative restructuring founded on a firm belief in social engineering on the basis of a prior plan of action. Implementing the plan required the willingness to deploy the coercive power of the state to achieve radical and utopian changes in people's working and living habits, moral conduct and worldviews. A precondition for realizing this far-reaching transformation is the absence of a civil order – or silencing it so that it has no opportunity to resist such high modernist plans.[43] 'Seeing like a state', as I would like to emphasize, was the ideological formula for the dirigistic style of the late-colonial administration that took shape in the Dutch East Indies towards the end of the nineteenth century. This, with the proviso that Scott's observation with regard to the subjugation of native populations elsewhere in the world applied here too: that the pretension of an all-encompassing plan of social reform to improve their well-being was wafer-thin.

The contours of a new economic policy

In the history of the Dutch East Indies, 1870 is recorded as a decisive turning point in the economic development of the archipelago. In that year, a series of agricultural laws were enacted bearing the stamp of Minister for the Colonies Engelbertus de Waal. Parliament approved the basic principles of a new economic policy that would regulate the phasing out of the system of forced cultivation and laid down the conditions for admitting private capital to the colony. While the colonial economy had until then been founded on the monopoly of the state, these changes heralded the beginning of the era of free enterprise capitalism. What the government envisaged and expected in 1870 seemed to be confirmed by what happened in the years that followed. Yet there was no question of a sharp break with the past. First of all, the forced cultivation of coffee continued, albeit with the suggestion that it had changed into peasant-directed production, although the government continued to prescribe the conditions under which it took place. The administrative reorganization had led to an eclipse of the regents' power. The lower chiefs had become government officials and continued to be the first point of contact for the people, so

43 In Scott's words: 'the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high-modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the leveled social terrain on which to build.' (Scott 1998: 5)

that this change had few radical consequences. The cultivation and corvee services remained in place for some time and the clergy retained their privileged status. The break with the old regime was thus not very sharp and abrupt. From the opposite perspective, too, private capital and free entrepreneurs were not exactly kicking down the door to invest in the Priangan *en masse*. On the contrary, it would take quite some time, until the last decade of the nineteenth century, for the expansion of agrarian capitalism to become more pronounced in the Sunda highlands. The 'turning point' was therefore more a process of transition that extended over a longer period, from around 1870-90. And the same applied to the preceding period; '1870' did not come unannounced in an administrative or an economic sense. As we have seen, the prelude to this watershed year had already been set in motion in the middle of the century. In summary, although the Priangan had stood apart from the rest of Java for a long time and enjoyed an exceptional status, a gradual transformation had been gathering momentum in many respects since the 1860s that anticipated the formal opening up of the region and the administrative reforms that were finally introduced in 1871. On the other hand, although the reforms of that year laid the basis for a radical change of course, the changes took some while to put into practice.

There was nevertheless a radical break with the past in one respect: the decision that all land to which no ownership rights were attached was property of the state. The Agrarian Law of 1870 regulated the issue of land to both private enterprises and to the native population. This meant that villagers would no longer have access to uncultivated land without the prior permission of the government. The ban was clearly incompatible with the villagers' right to lay claim to waste land bordering on their habitats. The colonial government was clearly aware of this custom, as is shown by a memorandum by Governor-General Van den Bosch from 1830, in which he stated that the territory of the village comprised both cultivated and uncultivated land, and that the borders of the settlements were adjacent, with no intervening land between them.

> ... with the exception of a few uninhabited areas of forest or wilderness, there is no land that does not belong to one dessa or another. Not all of the inhabitants of a village, however, have rights to reclaim uncultivated land, and even fewer have an equal right. These rights are only enjoyed by *sikaps*, who descend from those who have owned the land from the earliest times, or who have acquired one or more shares in it through purchase or inheritance. (Van den Bosch 1830)

This shows that only the better-off class of peasants could become usufructuaries of agrarian property. The privilege allowed them to lay claim to the labour of an underclass excluded from free access to unused land within or outside the settlement. The only way the class of landless could become cultivators of fields at their own expense and risk was by leaving the village. The cultivation ordinance of 1874 essentially confined the villagers to the area that they had reclaimed in former times. Without explicit official approval, a permit issued by higher authorities, no new land could be taken into cultivation.

What was the reason for restricting access to the use of waste land to grow food? Peasants naturally made use of the uncultivated land around the settlements but did not till it permanently until this became necessary as the number of households increased. This process of intensified use, which took several generations, meant that as dry plots were converted to *sawahs*, irrigation canals also had to be constructed. The instruction restricting the use of uncultivated land was drawn up by honorary adviser for native affairs Karel Holle. His reason for doing so was a firm conviction that the Sundanese peasants were guilty of practising large-scale slash-and-burn agriculture. His aim, in preventing them from making unrestricted and, in his view, wasteful use of what he saw as unused land was to force these slothful cultivators to use the resources they required to satisfy their basic needs more efficiently. He had a particular aversion to footloose peasants who set up temporary bivouacs in the forests and mountains, roughly cleared a plot of land to grow food and, after one or two harvests, abandoned it and moved on. These *huma* peasants stubbornly refused to submit to the straitjacket of a civilized existence, as Holle saw it.

> You should see them, living in huts fit only for dogs, badly clothed and run-down in body and mind and you will look more favourably on the lot of the native labourer employed by European planters. (Holle 1879: 82-3)

One district chief had complained to him about 'slash-and-burn nomads', freeloaders who could not be forced to provide corvee services and who simply moved to another area when pressed to do so. The honorary adviser also considered the rotating use of dry fields as a form of slash-and-burn. Most villages had an area of land tilled by peasants known as *tegalan* that provided the villagers with a necessary supplement to the yield of the *sawah* fields. These peasants were not nomadic but did regularly rotate their plots of land. Holle considered it primitive that peasants living like settled farmers would grow food in and around their villages in any other way than on

irrigated fields. His conviction that growing food on dry land – not only paddy but also secondary crops – was also a form of slash-and-burn cast doubt on Holle's expertise, despite the praise heaped upon him by his many admirers, then and later on.[44] In a critical examination of what continued to be the prevailing perception even after decolonization, Dove points out that the much higher yield of irrigated paddy fields was due to the intensive use of labour, which was at a much lower level in the case of tilling dry fields. He concludes that:

> ... intensive agriculture not only tends to yield a lower return on labor than extensive agriculture, but also that it is more vulnerable to state extraction. This extraction can reduce the net return on labor in an intensive system below that of an extensive system, even in cases in which the gross return of the former is higher. (Dove 1985: 7)

This conclusion explains why, as described above, many Priangan peasants remained so reluctant to change from dry- to wet-land cultivation, requiring considerable pressure from native chiefs and colonial officials to set the process in motion and keep it going.

The argument that Holle, as a beloved friend of the Sundanese people, presented against the slash-and-burn practices that he felt the peasants engaged in, was even less plausible because, in his many essays on this subject, he failed to mention the huge coffee plantations laid out in the Sundanese highlands during the preceding half a century. These, too, had to be abandoned after only a few years because the yield from the trees fell rapidly. The concern that Holle claimed to feel for the damage to the climate and to agriculture by deforestation and soil erosion on the mountainsides would have been more convincing if he had directed his criticisms towards this export industry set up on the orders of the colonial rulers. Boomgaard was completely justified in calling the years from 1826 to 1865 a period of ecological destruction on Java. Large-scale deforestation took place for the cultivation of coffee, which was believed to grow well on freshly reclaimed forest land (Boomgaard 1988). But it was the footloose peasants who were given the blame for the degradation of the Priangan landscape, despite the fact that as the nineteenth century progressed they were increasingly only to be found in the most remote areas. There were other reasons for denying the peasants the right to free cultivation of unused land. The relocation of coffee cultivation from the far-off gardens to nearer the villages made it

44 For example, the effusive ode to Holle in Van den Berge's biography (Van den Berge 1998).

necessary to use any land still available for this purpose. That did not happen immediately and there were persistent complaints about inadequate compliance with the ordinance on coffee cultivation. One major problem was that land registers were still incomplete and gave a strongly distorted view of the area of land that was more or less permanently under cultivation. Peasants accused of cultivating waste land denied that they had violated the regulations because they had used the land before, albeit periodically and not permanently. The government put a stop to what it considered clandestine cultivation by conducting cadastral surveys to gain an insight into the scale and nature of land ownership. Typical of the much more intensive involvement of the European authorities in the peasant economy was the reform of the tax system. This started in Cianjur in 1889, in the form of an experiment with a land tax, based on cadastral surveys, and was extended to the largest part of the Priangan two years later with the issue of a new land rent ordinance. The new system recorded the size, type and yield of all cultivated acreage. For the *sawah* owners this meant a tax on the yield, while for dry fields it was more of a tax on the land itself.

Denying the peasants access to more land than they used on a permanent basis served another colonial purpose, by allowing large areas to be leased to Western enterprises. The 'waste' lands that the state had requisitioned would in the decades that followed be issued to large agribusinesses at extremely favourable terms to produce crops for which there was a growing demand on the global market. The main product of these private corporations was tea, and the Priangan became one of the most important production areas. This development was slow at first but gathered momentum at the end of the nineteenth century. Like coffee, tea was a perennial crop and was planted in gardens when introduced by the government by way of experiment in the early 1830s. But, where coffee would eventually disappear from the region, tea production expanded steadily in the late-colonial period. In the middle of the century, only a small number of tea estates of no great size were in business in the whole residency. They were managed by a state-appointed administrator who was responsible for the planting, picking and processing of the crop. Holle started his career as a tea planter in 1858 when he was appointed administrator of one of these estates. Operating these leased enterprises proved so unsuccessful that the government decided in 1862 to deregulate the tea industry completely. Holle anticipated this policy change by applying the year before for a concession to set up a private tea plantation on uncultivated land that was leased to him. He financed this project with credit from the recently established Nederlandsch-Indische Handelsbank, thanks to the intercession of a member of his family by marriage. The

loan he contracted illustrated the important role that mercantile capital from the metropolis would play in the development of large-scale private agro-industry in the following decades. Holle also showed an interest in taking over coffee gardens to continue operating them on a private basis. The government turned down his proposal, having shown itself earlier to be unwilling to leave the cultivation of coffee to European entrepreneurs, as it had done with tea. In the mid-1850s, a request from a group of businessmen united in the West-Java Koffie Cultuur Maatschappij for a concession that would have laid claim to a very large tract of land, was rejected out of hand without even being considered (Goedhart 1948: 48).

Wasada tea estate in the hills above Garut, owned by K.F. Holle (photo pre-1874)

Source: KITLV Collection

Holle had little difficulty in finding sufficient labour to come and work and live at Waspada, his tea plantation on a mountainside south of Garut. According to his many admirers, this was because he was a generous and compassionate patron. However, I would like to suggest that the increasing pressure on agrarian resources had reached such a point that shortage of land for cultivation had forced more and more peasants to seek a living beyond the village and stop growing their own food. Holle's coolie workforce

settled on the estate and were given shelter on a small plot of land. They did not grow paddy, as they received a ration of rice every fourteen days as a supplement to their monthly cash wage. By paying them for piecework, Holle was assured of reaching his daily target, because without this incentive his workers would not perform their work regularly. He allowed them four free days a year and punished those who took unauthorized leave by docking two days' pay. I do not present these facts to harm the reputation of 'the benefactor of Waspada' as an employer, but only to illustrate that he ran his plantation little differently from other tea planters of his time. The 'peasant's friend' left little doubt that he considered the natives, in terms of economic mentality, simply inferior to Westerners, as a passage from his annual report to the *Handelsbank* shows.

> ... that the greatest obstacle to free labour lies not in the unchangeable nature of the native, but that, although much can be achieved with humane treatment and the application of sound economic principles, the fact remains that, because of the climate and his frailer physical build, he does not work as hard as a European workman. (Holle 1869: 11)[45]

In 1868 the Waspada estate *kampung* had 512 inhabitants, larger than most peasant localities in the Priangan. The emergence of more and more of these new coolie colonies testified to the advent of large-scale private agribusiness and its enormous expansion as time progressed. In 1870 only 3,385 *bahu* in the residency were in the hands of European agricultural ventures. By 1890, however, this had risen to 63,582 *bahu*, exploited by around 100 enterprises on the basis of long-term lease contracts. This explosive growth continued into the new century, so that by 1926 private agribusiness in the Priangan was in full swing, controlling 309,616 *bahu*. A large part of this land, which was no longer at the disposal of the native peasantry, was taken up by tea plantations, while rubber estates had emerged in the lower-lying areas (Scheltema 1927-28: 298). This agro-industrial development was made possible by ensuring that there would be an adequate supply of coolies to work on the plantations. And this was the final reason for the introduction of the Agrarian Law in 1870. It was an argument that had also been put forward in

45 In her colonial novel *The Tea Lords* (1992), Hella S. Haasse painted a romantic picture of life on the tea plantations in the second half of the nineteenth century. The company coolies form part of the backdrop for her portrayal of the tea barons during this period, which is known in Dutch colonial history as *tempo duluh* (the old times). Haasse fails, however, to show the harder aspects of the labour system introduced by the first generation of tea planters.

the correspondence of the founders and managers of the cultivation system. While persisting in public that the main motivation was to improve the lives of the native population, Baud laid out in a private letter to Van den Bosch at the start of 1831 why it was necessary to maintain a large class of landless peasants.

> The unequal distribution of worldly possessions is the only means of coercion that will ensure that the large working class will be willing to work for the richer classes at a low wage; a general process of levelling would mean the disappearance of this class, each individual would plant his own crops and all large-scale enterprises would fail of its own accord. (Westendorp Boerma II, 1956: 50-1)[46]

Denying the villagers of the Priangan access to uncultivated land villages thus meant not only that they no longer had a reserve to help ensure they could grow sufficient food to meet their basic needs but also that, in the long term, a pool of labour became available that private enterprises could make use of on vary favourable terms – low wages and without regular employment contracts.

The agrarian underclasses

As documented in earlier chapters, the predicament of the agrarian underclasses remained underexposed in the late-colonial literature partly because the government's attention was focused one-sidedly on the owners of land as the main target for collecting taxes. The preoccupation of policy-makers with the better-off peasantry is reflected in the data gathered over time on the native population and how they lived. Reports on the impact of the administrative and agrarian reforms of 1870 on the land-poor and landless classes in the Priangan are equally scarce. It is important to note that these segments had been present in the rural economy before the colonial era and their existence cannot therefore be attributed to colonial rule as such. Native society was traditionally based on unequal access to land as a way of allowing the privileged classes to lay claim to the labour of deprived groups. The more that colonial authorities learned about the peasant landscape in which they were operating, the more visible this

46 Westendorp Boerma, J.J., *Briefwisseling tussen J. van den Bosch en J.C. Baud*, part II, Utrecht 1956.

underside became. Commissioner-General Van den Bosch thus wrote in his well-known 'Memoir':

> Among the Javanese there is a large class of proletarians. Disinclined to engage in an enduring employment relationship, they roam the land, working when they have the opportunity, otherwise stealing and robbing, such that they pose a genuine danger to the public order. Veth included this observation in his work on Java, adding: 'It is these vagabonds, who only become *orang menumpang* when they find regular work in the dessas, that are responsible for the rough *gaga* cultivation in the mountains, which leads to such reckless destruction of the forests'. (Quoted in Veth I, 1875: 660)

It has already been noted that especially land-poor peasants and landless labourers were set to work in the coffee gardens. According to a report from the Resident of the Priangan Regencies in 1861, in every village in his district there was a class of *batur* or *bujang* who acknowledged their employer as their lord and master and did everything he ordered them to do. Their bosses made use of these servants to perform the corvee services they were obliged to provide as landowners.

Did the colonial tax system bring about any change in the social composition of the peasant order? This is a difficult to answer question, due to a lack of empirical evidence, but it is reasonable to assume that the increasing pressure to produce greater and greater quantities of coffee exacerbated existing inequalities rather than relieved them. Class differentiation among the peasantry was accompanied by large-scale and persistent mobility. Van den Bosch, who had combated pauperism in the metropolis early in his career by deporting the undeserving poor, vagabonds and paupers to penal institutions, encountered a social underclass in the colony equally unwilling to submit to the authority of the government. The Governor-General settled for the same remedy, ordering the confinement of:

> ... all persons who, by their footloose behaviour, idleness and bad conduct, have proved themselves to be harmful to society, without having committed a specific crime, for a maximum of ten years in a penal labour institution (Westendorp Boerma 1950: 113-4).[47]

47 Idem, *Een geestdriftig Nederlander*. Amsterdam 1950.

The approach was clearly inspired by Van Sevenhoven's plans to form a pool of unpaid labour which the colonial government could make use of as it wished. In his 1856 village monograph, Kinder de Camarecq noted that the native population was strikingly unattached to the places where they lived. Almost half of the inhabitants of Sembir, the location of his survey, came from elsewhere (1861: 269). This shows that mobility was also widespread before the administrative reorganization. It is very doubtful whether the pass system introduced in 1816 hampered the roaming around of the class of landless peasants. But the power to grant or deny permission to leave the settlement – even for a short time, let alone move permanently – certainly increased the authority of the native chiefs. The abolition of the obligation to report on all movements in 1863 occurred at the suggestion of former Resident of the Priangan Regencies Van der Wijck. Appointed to the Council of the Indies, he had advocated that the owners of agribusinesses be allowed to recruit the labour they needed from wherever they could find them. Defenders of the cultivation system called in vain for the pass system to be maintained to prevent people from moving elsewhere, temporarily or permanently, to evade their obligations to provide labour services. Yet supporters of free enterprise also expressed their concerns about the transition to a labour regime based not on settled peasants, but on a class of footloose, unreliable and undisciplined land-poor and landless labourers.

> Free labourers are mainly taken from this class of people, who are on a very low rung of morality. They like to play games, dice, are addicted to opium and seek the company of dancing girls. In order to satisfy these passions they have to go in search of employment or steal. The coolie *establishments* for transporting goods usually employ such footloose folk. Factories and enterprises also have to use them to do work that settled peasants are not obliged to perform. ... [These people] are of a much lower calibre than the settled peasants who perform compulsory labour, and may God preserve us from too many of these free labourers. (Hasselman 1862: 32)

This deep mistrust of unattached labour, nomadic at the foot of the agrarian economy, would return later in the century in denunciations of the brazen intractability of the coolies contracted for work in the plantation belt which emerged on the east coast of Sumatra. The only way to confine this 'riffraff and scum', recruited from the rural regions of Java, in the straitjacket of the plantation and impose discipline on them was to threaten them with penal sanctions (Breman 1987b). It did not go this far in the Priangan, but the

residency authorities did receive a request from the agro-industrial lobby in 1876 to allow measures to punish deserting coolies more severely. The new policy of deregulating ordinances restricting or, vice versa, compelling labour mobility followed on from an earlier decision by the colonial government to no longer extend official support to private entrepreneurs in their efforts to recruit seasonal labour. This had long been standing practice, as shown by the instruction to the Resident of Cirebon to send *bujang* to the lands around Batavia to work in the sugar mills. Nicolaus Engelhard had already opposed the annual requisition of labour in 1794 because of the coercion that accompanied it (De Haan IV, 1912: 79-80). This intercession by the government came to an end in 1834 when it became clear that forced recruitment in the regions where the mobilized labourers lived had repeatedly caused unrest. Settled peasants obliged to take part in this migratory form of labour could exempt themselves by paying a sum of money and designating a substitute. The costs however increased until the pay-off amounted to thirty guilders, a buffalo team, a quantity of paddy and a sack of cotton. Moreover, many of these migratory labourers, an army of 4,000 men who were under contract for a year, often deserted en route. The owners of the agribusinesses were informed that, in the future, they would have to find their own labour force, just as the Chinese owners of the sugar mills were accustomed to doing.

The above shows that the reorganization of governance and coffee cultivation in the Priangan was part of a wider package of reforms that marked the transition to a system of colonial exploitation based on the free market. Bonded labour, which had been the basis of the cultivation system, made way for encouraging the voluntary supply of labour, while the previous policy of immobilization was replaced by a focus on promoting mobility both geographically and between sectors. Under this liberalized economy, the existing gap between the higher and lower classes widened. The growing inequality within the peasant economy was partly a consequence of the commercialization of food production, which led to the concentration of farmland in the hands of large-scale landowners, at the expense of less prosperous households. It was a trend further strengthened by preventing the native population from using uncultivated land. This was a restriction that especially affected land-poor peasants for whom tilling dry fields was one of the only ways they could preserve their independence from large landowners and to move up on the social ladder. One clear indication of the steadily increasing pressure on agrarian resources was the worsening of conditions for sharecropping during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, to which Scheltema had drawn attention (1927-28: 332-3; see also

Economie van de desa, residentie Preanger Regentschappen IXa, OMW, 1907: 9). The unfavourable circumstances in which petty landowners now found themselves were exacerbated by the fact that they had to perform more corvee services than would have been the case if the work imposed on the *desa* as a collectivity had been distributed more evenly. Surrendering all their possessions was the most radical solution, when the burden of landownership outweighed the benefits. This consideration explained why:

> ... the owners of small plots of farmland, especially if it was lower quality dry soil, often preferred to dispose of their land and become *panumpang* or *bujang* at a European agri-enterprise than to continue to have to provide corvee services. (Velders 1909: 87-8)

What means of subsistence were available to the growing rural proletariat in the new economy that was now emerging? As before, they continued to be dependent on the better-off peasant class, for whom they continued to work as day-labourers, farm servants or sharecroppers. They supplemented this by performing corvee services for the colonial government, imposed as a tribute in the form of labour in addition to the land tax. They were obliged to perform these activities either at the orders of their patrons or as paid substitutes for others. Outside the village and native agriculture they formed a floating pool of labour for the infrastructural projects now being undertaken on a large scale, especially building roads, bridges and railways. These were labour-intensive public works which reflected the progressive opening up of the region. Although they stimulated the growth of trade, transport and services, the land-poor and landless classes in the Priangan also benefited, even though their access to these new forms of economic activity never extended further than to their employment as a casual and unskilled workforce. Lastly, from among their ranks emerged the great mass of coolie labourers who were employed by large-scale private agribusinesses, of which Holle's tea plantation was an early example. As this summary clearly shows, the large majority of land-poor and landless inhabitants of the Priangan, with their roots in the lowest echelons of the agrarian hierarchy, continued to be confined at the bottom of the more diversified rural economy both within and beyond the village, and were paid an extremely meagre wage. Released from a sedentary existence based on subordination and bondage, this underclass was condemned to circulate permanently between irregular, unskilled forms of employment based on hard capitalist principles. This made them behave with indifference

and unpredictability that seemed to justify the negative opinion of them expressed by the expatriate managers of the agricultural estates.

> In the Priangan Regencies you will often hear not a single complaint about anything, not even a murmur, and then the permanent employees of an enterprise will suddenly up and leave, and not a few at a time; in other words, all of the day-labourers will simply not turn up for work. If you then instigate an inquiry, they will say that something came up and they found this the easiest way to free themselves of their obligations; in the environs of Batavia there is – or was until recently – in some areas such a floating population, mostly in the higher parts of the country, and preferably in the forested mountains. Because of their constant roaming around, they are known as *burung*, or *orang bunjaga* or names with a similar meaning. They are averse to all outside interference, except by their leaders or seniors, and it is very difficult to get them to perform any kind of regular work. The greatest caution is required or they fly away, like the *burung* or birds that they are. (Riesz I, 1883: 100)

This is the classic flight behaviour of a proletarianized class. The management of the large-scale agribusinesses responded to this tendency to run away to avoid having to comply with the onerous and badly paid work regime by demanding heavy punishments for desertion (Ministry for the Colonies, mail reports 1876, no. 616). The complaint was that coolies who refused to provide the agreed labour services in exchange for earnest money or an advance were in breach of their contract.

The price of labour, which continued to be kept at a low level in the period before and shortly after the turn of the century (20 to 25 cents a day for men, 15 cents for women and 7 cents for children) contrasted sharply with the high returns that capital enjoyed from the development of the region (Economie van de desa, residentie Preanger Regentschappen IXa, OMW, 1907: 69-71). The same source reported that coolie wages had stagnated at the same low level for at least the preceding twenty years. The administrative and agrarian reforms of 1870 paved the way for the release of labour from corvee services in the decades that followed but the progress made in this respect did little to improve the lot of many inhabitants of the region in any significant way. The system based on coercion may have been exchanged for one based on free labour, but in both cases the mobilization of a large part of the native population remained limited to subsidiary work, in a manner causing the lowest damage possible to what was and remained their prior concern, the provisioning of sufficient food for their own needs.

Where spatial mobility had previously focused on uninhabited areas and the cultivation of wilderness as a means of escaping the pressure exercised by overly harsh masters, migrants now went in search of wage labour in the large-scale agribusinesses. The *Onderzoek Mindere Welvaart* (Diminishing Welfare Investigations) instigated at the start of the twentieth century showed that footloose labour was the order of the day in the Priangan.

> ... a class of drifting nomads among the native population and known to them as *jelema tihang hejo*, that is, people who never took the trouble to settle down in a somewhat sustainable dwelling, migrants in the broadest sense of the word. (Economie van de desa, residentie Preanger Regentschappen IXa, OMW, 1907: 7)

This mobility was not vertical but horizontal, as it was as good as impossible to move upward from the lowest rung of the social ladder. In the tea gardens the footloose peasants were only eligible for work that required no or very few skills, such as picking and sorting the leaves, as practised but unskilled labour in the gardens, factories and transport, drivers, carpenters and bricklayers for the maintenance of roads, or as smiths to make and repair agricultural tools, tea-chest makers, basket weavers, cart-drivers, for delivering wood for burning and for carpentry, etc. Almost the only one who rose above this was the *mandur* or foreman, praised as the 'right-hand of the manager', but who was not entrusted with any form of financial management for fear that he lacked the integrity for such a responsibility. In addition, they also worked as *warung* holders and *pasar* traders, but only on a small scale. They were cart-drivers but not transport entrepreneurs, simple craftsmen with few tools and no match for the much better equipped Chinese artisans. Compared with half a century earlier, the purchasing power of the population had hardly increased and the ongoing contraction of the native economy had not been reversed.

One of the questions in the *Onderzoek Mindere Welvaart* (OMW) held in the early twentieth century was: 'What articles produced by the Native population are in no respect at all inferior to the same articles produced elsewhere?' The answers were very telling: according to experts on the Priangan economy, the limited range of native craft products were either too expensive or of inferior quality (OMW, Overzicht Inlandsche Handel en Nijverheid, VIb 1909). The circulation of money may have been given a new impetus but it is very arguable whether it had led to any real progress. Since cottage or home-based industry had disappeared during the era of forced cultivation, the native population had no other choice than to buy cheap

imported clothing, pottery and other consumer goods from Chinese retailers. It would therefore be premature to see the presence of such goods even in the households of the lowest classes as an indication that their economic situation had improved. The abridged extracts from the Colonial Reports between 1849 and 1908, included in the overview in annex 7 of the MWO, show clearly that native trade in the Priangan Regencies had stagnated at a very low level. The reports were equally damning about local artisanal production. It was therefore not surprising that a subsidiary report (IX) was added to the results of the MWO in which native respondents themselves identified laxity as the main reason why the population remained in a state of deprivation.

The economic and social system that had evolved in the Priangan Regencies was met with approval by those at its top, since the duality that had become visible confirmed the prevailing stereotypical perspective why the superior segment should gain and how the losses of the inferior segment were caused by their own defects. It was the essence of a speech which Dr J. Bosscha delivered to the members of the Sukabumi Agricultural Association in April 1909. He gave a concise summary of what had become the tenet of modern-colonial ideology. After explaining why the natives simply lacked the capacities required to become estate owners themselves – because of their insufficient intelligence, absence of efficiency, perseverance and so on – and that it would be better for them to remain in the slot that had been allotted to them, he went on to proclaim that:

> A land will only achieve the highest level of prosperity when there is a harmonious relationship between capital, intellect and labour. It is a completely erroneous policy to wish to *transform* the *latter*, which is needed in the greatest quantity, into the *other two*. It would be equal to an army in which the largest proportion is made up of generals. The prosperity that is undeniably to be found in areas where there is much industry, and the tea industry in particular, would be substantially diminished if the happy relationship between the three classes were to be destroyed. Everywhere on Java, where this exists, the people are prosperous and there is no hunger; the three classes work together and protect each other. The worker provides labour, the intelligent class organizes the work, and the capital bears the risk. All enjoy the fruits of this endeavour. (Velders 1909: 22-3)

Bosscha sketched a process of dependent development that captured the character of the transformation that had taken place in the Sunda

highlands. This late-colonial pattern had its own dynamics, exemplified by a political economy in which those who made up the bottom segments remained stuck in subordination. For those who were in control, it was a profitable enterprise, but they allowed the labouring classes nothing more than a coolie existence. It was a development the foundations for which had been laid in the early-colonial era.

Epilogue: Servitude as the road to progress

The cultivation system gave a powerful boost to the production of export crops on Java for the world market between 1830 and 1870. The notion that colonial economy and society changed radically in this relatively short period is correct, but is incomplete unless qualified with the understanding that the regime of forced labour that formed the cornerstone of this economy had disrupted the peasant order for much longer, especially in the Priangan Regencies. The suggestion that the system of forced cultivation and delivery of coffee in this region must be considered an early precursor to the cultivation system can be reversed, by stating that what developed in the hinterland of Batavia in the early eighteenth century developed into a pattern of servitude that a hundred years later coerced the population in much of Java into serving the interests of the mother country. Between 1831 and 1866, annual remittances by the government of the East Indies during the era of the cultivation system amounted to some 500 million guilders. This is a conservative estimate of the profits that the mother country enjoyed from the colony. Recent studies, such as those by Van Zanden and Van Riel (2000) and Gordon (2009), mention much higher amounts. Besides paying off its debts,[48] the Dutch state used these public revenues generated overseas to finance large infrastructural works at home, including the building of railways, and exempted the metropolitan bourgeoisie from paying an income tax.. On top of this drain from the colony came the profits, savings, revenues from the sales of possessions and cultivation commission that expatriates (planters, merchants and civil servants) sent or brought home with them. Although criticism of the regime of overseas exploitation and repression, which drew its main political support from the growing metropolitan bourgeoisie, gathered momentum after the middle of the nineteenth century, it largely focused on the government's monopoly on the cultivation and delivery of colonial goods. Despite the ripples caused by Multatuli, sympathy with the lot of the mass of peasants in the colony was

48 The surplus earned through unfree labour in the East Indies was also used to buy the freedom of slaves in the West Indies in 1863. In Surinam, planters were paid 300 guilders per slave to compensate for the loss of their property. The release of some 33,000 slaves cost the state of the Netherlands less than ten million guilders. Apart from their manumission, the slaves themselves did not receive any compensation.

subordinate to the desire to reign in the exclusive control of the colonial bureaucracy and create greater scope for private enterprise. The proponents of economic liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century were unanimously critical of the merits of the cultivation system. A century later, a number of studies had been published that took a slightly more cautious and apologist approach.

This revisionist tendency, in my view related to a school of colonial history with a pronounced statist character, is the main thrust of the work of Van Niel, Fasseur and Elson, published in the final quarter of the twentieth century.[49] It is certainly not the case that these authors, by contrast to earlier accounts that decry the cultivation system, tend to speak only in laudatory terms of what policy-makers intended and practised on Java in the mid-nineteenth century. But their favourable assessments are firmly focused on the management of the colonial enterprise. Van Niel and Fasseur in particular remain far removed from the workfloor and the readers of their studies learn very little of how the system affected the peasants on Java. Fasseur is aware of the one-sidedness of this approach, explaining it in the foreword to his thesis. He is primarily interested in how the policy-makers both in the metropolis and in the colony responded to the forces unleashed by the cultivation system. In his view, this question excludes in advance highlighting the impact from an Indonesian perspective. He adds that such an approach would be possible only on the basis of studies that would do justice to the local context. In this way, he identifies an altogether different dichotomy that has nothing to do with adopting a Dutch or an Indonesian perspective, but with the choice to either focus on the interests of the local population or those of the government. Fasseur clearly gives preference to the latter. He repeats the argument adopted by Van Niel, namely that the great local variation renders it virtually impossible to reach conclusions that can be generalized. Van Niel emphasizes that what was presented as a system actually disintegrated in practice into an 'interlocking set of local accommodations'. Elson started his study of the cultivation system and its longer-term impact by investigating the cultivation of sugarcane in the

49 'Java under the cultivation system' (1992) is a compilation of essays published by Van Niel on this subject over a period of more than 20 years. After his thesis *Kultuurstelsel en koloniale baten* (1975), Fasseur edited a compilation of contributions on the cultivation system by various authors, including himself, entitled *Geld en geweten* (1980). In 'Javanese peasants and the colonial sugar industry: Impact and change in an East Java residency, 1830-1940' (1984), Elson limited himself to developments in one region during and after the introduction of forced cultivation. In 'Village Java under the Cultivation System, 1830-1870' (1994), he expanded his analysis to the whole of Java, taking account of an enormous quantity of archival resources.

eastern corner of Java. In doing so, he was responding to the standpoint that a regional approach is necessary to understand how the regime of forced labour operated. This is, however, not the full story as Elson believes that it is certainly possible and even desirable to draw conclusions about the cultivation system that transcend local differences. The observation about the lack of uniformity as emphasized by Van Niel and Fasseur is – in the light of a whole series of contrasts between plains and hilly areas, different population densities and social structures, divergent forms of governance, widely varying agricultural practices, etc. – self-evident rather than striking. Despite the specifics of the many different contexts, however, it is important to address the question of how the peasant order on Java experienced the colonial regime. Elson answers this question in a comprehensive and deeply researched follow-up study, but in which he does not succumb to the tendency to emphasize the differences rather than the similarities. The quotations with which he opens his introduction do stress the diversity that confronted those charged with implementing the cultivation system, a differentiation that only intensified as the chosen course was pursued. It is interesting that he justifies extending his analysis to the whole of Java by stating that all historians aspire to draw general conclusions. This statement places Elson not so far from the conclusions that Van Niel and Fasseur draw from their studies. Important as it is, the *couleur locale* that they drew explicit attention to earlier disappears at the end when they have to find an answer to the question whether the colonized peasantry benefited or suffered from the cultivation system. All three reach the obvious conclusion that the lion's share of the profits from the system flowed into the Netherlands' national coffers, but they also all agree that the increase in production brought more benefits than harm to the peasants on Java. Their shared *parti pris* is squarely opposed to my own assessment that the large majority of successive generations of coffee cultivators in the Sunda highlands remained immersed in poverty and suffered severely under the regime of forced labour to which they were exposed in the period covered by my study (1720 to 1870), initially with the introduction of the Priangan system and later under its extension as part of the cultivation system.[50]

Van Niel is very resolute in his belief that the system benefited the local population, though he does admit that the larger peasant owners benefited

50 The positive reappraisal of the impact of forced cultivation on the situation of the native population has not gone unnoticed in recent Dutch colonial historiography. De Jong, for example, welcomes the breakthrough of the revisionist perspective and is satisfied to conclude that it has finally put paid to earlier critical assessments (De Jong 1998: 203-25).

at the expense of the classes that owned less land or none at all. As before, the land-poor and landless classes remained dependent on the better-off segments in the village system (Van Niel 1990: 87). In his considered view, however, the quality of life improved across the board under the cultivation system, a leap upwards that was even more striking when, after the regime of forced labour was abolished, the situation of the local people became worse rather than better.

> Current research into prosperity in Javanese villages tends to support the idea that there was more material wealth in Java during the Cultivation System than in the years following its demise. (Van Niel 1992: 214)

Fasseur appears to agree with Van Niel's verdict, supported by his calculation that the planters were paid more in wages than was imposed on them in the form of land rent. The increased purchasing power meant that the common people were now able to buy goods that used to be beyond their reach. Fasseur does admit that the planters in the Priangan, where most of the coffee was produced, were paid much less than their counterparts elsewhere on Java, but this was compensated for by the fact that they were exempt from land rent (Fasseur 1980: 124, note 39). Apart from the extremely low wage that the Priangan peasants received for their labour, Fasseur completely ignores the fact that they also had to surrender a fifth share of their paddy yield to the local chiefs, which in itself was higher than the land rent introduced by the government. Another factor that distorts the arguments of both Van Niel and Fasseur is that they focus more on the cultivation of sugarcane than on coffee. Yet Fasseur himself reports figures that show that coffee was by far the more important crop. Besides the fact that coffee generated much more income for the Dutch national coffers than sugar, the impact on the local population was also much greater, with two and a half to three times more households involved in the forced cultivation of the crop between 1840 and 1860 (Fasseur 1975, annex 1). In 1850 56 per cent of the peasants in Java were assigned to the forced cultivation of coffee while in the same year only 21 per cent were engaged in growing surgarcane. This severely unequal burden on labour weighed even more heavily because coffee had already been produced for more than a century – primarily in the Priangan – when the peasants living on the plains of Java were subjected to the forced cultivation of sugarcane.

The criticism of devoting insufficient attention to the huge army of conscripted labour employed in coffee cultivation cannot be aimed at Elson. Although his first study focuses on the importance of sugarcane,

for his analysis of Java as a whole he extended his study to coffee, the crop that generated four-fifths of the colonial profits. Elson does not dismiss lightly the heavy burden imposed on the hundreds of thousands of peasants mobilized to grow this important export crop, nor does he fail to mention many of the abuses that the system gave rise to. Where the coffee regime was far less oppressive and the peasants received a much better price for the beans, as in the eastern regions of Java, there was more scope for improving living conditions and those of the land-poor and landless classes did not deteriorate as they did for their counterparts in the Priangan. Elson ends his argument by drawing up the balance of the cultivation system, noting the strictures and disadvantages, but concluding that its overall effects were positive. He rejects the claim that forced cultivation brought poverty, asserting the opposite, that 'the Cultivation System promoted a previously unknown level of general prosperity among the peasantry' (Elson 1994: 305). He appeals to his statistics to show that this applies equally to the cultivation of coffee.

> They indicate the presence, through forced coffee cultivation, of enormous amounts of disposable income in the hands of the peasantry, something that could not have occurred on so a large scale in the years before 1830. Forced labour it was, and cheaply paid to boot, but it was income which would not otherwise have been realised. (*ibid.*: 314)

I would like to counter this argument by pointing out that, during this period, there was no substantial increase in the circulation of money in the Priangan. The residency reports repeatedly noted the low level of monetization of the peasant economy, which was undoubtedly largely due to the low wage of only a few cents a day. I will return later to the main conclusion from Elson's argument – the same with which Van Niel and Fasseur close their studies. But first I would like to refer to two side arguments that Elson uses to support his conclusions. The first suggests that the cultivation of coffee did not require the requisition of land owned and used by the peasants. Secondly, he claims that the regime of forced labour may have reduced the opportunities for other sources of employment and income – as any remaining time had to be used to produce sufficient food – but that this disadvantage was considerably outweighed by the peasants' increased purchasing power. In the previous chapters, I have disputed the validity of both these claims in respect of the Priangan. Colonial officials in this region refused time and again to accept that the peasants were able to satisfy what was their main concern: to produce enough staple food. Year

after year, the residency reports noted the inadequate quantities of rice available to feed the population. There must have been almost no time at all to grow secondary crops like pulses and vegetables, so important for a balanced diet. What had initially been introduced as a subsidiary activity – planting a few coffee shrubs that required little maintenance close to their homes – and which in the eyes of the colonial administrators was easy to combine with the time and energy required to grow food, soon evolved into a heavy burden. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, an instruction was issued to increase the stock of coffee trees to 1,000 per planter. This excessive burden was dictated from above to meet the growing demand on the world market, with no awareness at all of the amount of labour it required. It was now no longer only the male head of the household who was exposed to the regime of forced labour. It was taken for granted that the women and children would help to grow the coffee. Such a massive increase in the burden of labour could not but have a far-reaching impact on the structure of the household and the distribution of labour within it, for example, on the social and economic position of the women. Elson has no problem admitting that women and children were mobilized *en masse* in the forced cultivation of crops (1994: 205). In his view, however, this added burden had an emancipatory effect as it brought to an end the confinement of the women to the household and thereby represented a breakthrough in the gendered division of labour. This begs the question of whether his convoluted conclusion also applies to the enormous increase in child labour. The highly intensified burden on peasant labour was not a point of discussion in early-colonial reports. It was imposed from higher up in the form of orders and instructions and those in power expressed their displeasure if the quotas were not met, ranted about the excessive laziness of the peasants and the lack of pliability of the local chiefs, without concerning themselves with the causes of their reluctance. Statements of a more critical nature were an exception in official documents. Such as the question posed by Muntinghe in one of his many memoranda of how a farmer back in the Netherlands would respond if told to make do with half, a quarter or even a tenth part of his yield. The more the regime of unfreedom became accepted as normal, the rarer such attempts to challenge its premises became. By then, the notion of the colonized subject as having completely different standards to those that prevailed in the West had become well established. He was seen as the 'Other', to whom one's own norms and values do not apply. Any appeal also to live by them in the colonial domain was neither possible nor desirable. The political and social convictions that had taken root in Europe were in principle not valid beyond the metropolis. There was

no room for Enlightenment ideals in the exploitation of overseas territories, as it had evolved in the Priangan lands from the start of the eighteenth century. This meant that Muntinghe, now in his official guise as president of the Council of Financial Affairs, summarized in an advisory report to the Commissioners-General on 4 September 1817 what the essence of the coffee regime was and should remain.

> Working in the coffee gardens gratis and delivering the crop exclusively to the government for the lowest possible price undoubtedly produces immediate and the greatest benefits. (Van Deventer 1891: 190)

I now return to the main revisionist argument, the alleged increase in purchasing power of the peasants as a result of the far-reaching under-utilization of their labour power being brought to a resolute end. This is the well-known *mise-en-valeur* thesis that the intervention of the foreign ruler was necessary to develop the country and its people, to add value where it was absent before. Corroborating what he had written on an earlier occasion (1990: 45), Elson referred in his summing up approvingly to a colonial source stating that:

> if [the land at present planted with coffee] were left to the people for the cultivation of other products of native industry ... it can safely be accepted that nine-tenths of these lands would remain uncultivated and the population would enjoy an insignificant gain from them. (1994: 314)

This is a stereotypical charge dating back to the VOC era and frequently repeated to justify the force employed to commit the native population to cultivate and deliver agrarian products. Colonial archivist De Haan, who processed a colossal volume of documentation in his four-volume work at the beginning of the twentieth century, did not fail to mention a single case of abuse by VOC officials in his imposing retrospective on the origins of the Priangan coffee regime. His considered final judgment was nevertheless that the hard hand of authority may have produced much pain and suffering, but that it was unfortunately necessary to instil the inhabitants of the Sunda highlands with the economic discipline that they lacked. The imperative to work was imposed rigorously from above but, given the primitive state of development in which the peasants stagnated, there was no better alternative. Indeed, the means justified the ends, not least because the outcome was in the final instance also beneficial to the coffee planters themselves. The increase in production was achieved by

making efficient use of time that was available in abundance and had previously been spent in idleness. But was there not a disproportionate gap between the benefits enjoyed by the Company and the costs to the population? Creaming off the surplus, De Haan concluded, simply meant combating ostentatious laziness and was therefore an intervention that contributed to the progress of civilization.

> If one speaks of the disproportionate relationship between the imposition of rigorous labour and excessive profits made, it should be noted that this discrepancy amounts to a loss of time, and that it is more than doubtful whether the peasants would have spent this leisure time on improving their lot rather than lazing around. Forced cultivation may not have led to advancement, but it can hardly have had a stultifying effect on a population so unproductive, cultivators who preferred clearing gaga to laying out *sawahs*. (De Haan III, 1912: 578)

De Haan disagreed with Nicolaus Engelhard who, during his time as commissioner for native affairs (1791-98), held the view that 'the Javanese must be driven and beaten to work as though they were animals'. Yet the archivist did belong with those who tended to see the early-colonial enterprise as essentially a development mission. He readily admitted, however, that it took a long time for the beneficial effects of this noble endeavour to become visible. But that was to be expected. The work of civilization could not be achieved overnight. Did the Netherlands also not owe its success to the hard struggle fought tirelessly by our forefathers?

> A nation such as ours which has worked day and night, which has fought endlessly, which has sacrificed its material wealth and its blood without looking back to maintain its position in the march forwards, should truly not find it too hard that *this Sundanese folk with no marrow or pith, created as woodchoppers and water-carriers for stronger races, incapable of releasing themselves in an eternity from the grind of a slumbering existence in slavish servitude to Chiefs and Princes* [my italics], that this Sundanese folk, we say, should have been forced to work with their hands at the orders of foreign masters and to their benefit to share the blessings of a state of civilization, which was only reached in the West through centuries of bitter struggle. (De Haan I, 1910: 438-9)

In this mindboggling statement, the racist tone that gave a special significance to the encounter between colonizer and colonized can clearly be

heard. And as for the coercion that accompanied this clash, when all was said and done it was not really so bad and, in any case, a hard hand was necessary to turn these obstinate and slothful subsistence peasants into eager, fully fledged producers. This viewpoint, though undoubtedly dominant, was counterbalanced by a radically dissenting perspective already early on in which the coffee gardens of the Priangan were seen as slave plantations (P. de Haan 1829).

The idea that forced labour may have been unpleasant but was unavoidable was an elaboration of the *mise-en-valeur* notion that had many advocates in European metropolises during the late colonial era, even in more progressive political circles.[51] Native populations had to be denied their freedom in order to coach them to progress under strict supervision. Discipline as a condition for achieving civilization was the ideology that Van den Bosch had felt necessary to combat poverty and pauperization in the mother country and to arouse the desire of the Javanese peasants to work. The Encyclopaedia Britannica hailed him:

> ... as a statesman who expanded the poor-relief system and instituted the paternalistic Dutch East Indies Culture System, by which vast riches in export crops were extracted ... and in which he argued against a liberal colonial system and for a strongly paternalistic one, claiming that people unaccustomed to a work ethic needed strong guidance. (Accessed on 27-6-2013)

At first sight, then, the royal adviser's activities in the metropolis and the colony were driven by the same motivation: to uplift the people and give them prospects for improvement. These parallels led historian Albert Schrauwers to label the cultivation system, no less than the pauper colonies in the metropolis, as Enlightenment projects in modern state-building.[52] Both were designed by the same policy-maker, Johannes van den Bosch. While paupers were seen as work-shy, Javanese peasants refused to produce a surplus from which they themselves would be the first to benefit. The approach applied in the benevolent colonies set up in the mother country was of the same order as the pressure to which the people of Java were subjected, for their own good – both aimed at advancement to a higher level.

51 See, for example, Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises.* Paris 1923.

52 A. Schrauwers, 'The "Benevolent" Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 43/2, April 2001: 298-328.

Schrauwers concluded that the methods developed to instil this productive virtue among the poor in the metropolis were applied on a broader scale on Java. Yet this conclusion also signifies a turning point in his exposé, as the method employed to impose discipline – the exercise of force – does not change the fact that the purpose and impact of the two courses of policy in metropolis and colony were radically different.

> The Cultivation System transformed large parts of Java into a para-penal institution, an enclaved economy. Whereas the colonists of the Benevolent Society [in the metropolis] were allowed to progress as just outlined, no such progression was possible in Java under the Cultivation System (*ibid*.: 321)

Since the colony was seen from the very beginning as primarily a source of profits for the metropolis, any policy claiming to give priority to the welfare of the subaltern population in the colony could do nothing more than pay lip service to this enlightened objective.

The colonial mode of production generated not only coffee, but also the myth of the inefficient, defective native who lacked the incentive and the capacity to set himself to work, and who therefore had to be as it were forced to progress. This viewpoint evolved into a basic principle of colonial ideology, justifying and legitimizing unfree labour as an unavoidable inconvenience that would benefit also the subjected party, if not in the short term then certainly over a longer period. This doctrine of backwardness denied the native population the capability for self-development because it lacked the economic drive, as embodied in the behaviour of Western man. In his thesis (1910) Julius Herman Boeke formulated the basic principles of the economic and general social dualism in which he characterized the deviant behaviour of the Eastern people, whose limited needs should be seen not as a time-bound aberration but a permanent feature, leading them to live in self-imposed exclusion with extremely low living standards. This dogma would resurface after the completion of the decolonization process in the second half of the twentieth century, in studies that sought to interpret the underdevelopment of the poorer parts of the world as due to internal rather than external conditions. Examining the applicability of this proposition in the post-colonial era is far beyond the scope of this study. Of relevance, however, is the discussion Goedhart devotes to the failure of coffee production as a peasant mode of production after the abolition of the Priangan regime in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. He summarizes the situation at the end of his

book with the observation that the conscripted cultivators had become redundant in growing paddy and had not succeeded in evolving into free coffee peasants, but offered their services as wage coolies to large-scale private agribusinesses. In his view, the transition from peasant-owner to wage labourer illustrated the unfortunate incapacity of native producers to work on the basis of their own enlightened self-interest (Goedhart 1948: 232). In this explanation, the victims of unfree labour could only blame their own defects if they regressed rather than progressed socially. Where the state has evolved in interaction with society, a reasonable balance can develop between the two. In the colonial situation, however, the edifice of public power and authority may have exerted considerable pressure on social relations, but it was unable to acquire more than a fragile and inadequate grip on native society, let alone become embedded in it. In the context of an expanding global market, the late-colonial state also remained a 'foreign body' and assumed a position of domination that left no space for countervailing power. Nevertheless, this state apparatus was unable to impose its will to govern effectively on the society it appropriated. 'Seeing like a state' was eventually also a fiasco in the tropical territories of the Netherlands.

I would like to briefly examine the modality employed by the colonial authorities to achieve what they had ordered: more and more coffee. The prevailing view is that they succeeded in this ambition by making clever use of native institutions, customs and values. Before and after Governor-General Van den Bosch, the directorate of the colonial enterprise created the impression that, in implementing their designs, they preferred accommodation to confrontation, by taking the situation as they encountered it as the starting point for achieving their objectives. And with great success, if we are to believe not only their own resolute testimonies but also those of outsiders.[53] For the production of colonial goods, the authorities relied on the traditional servitude of the peasants to their lords. Not interfering in the affairs of the native population, including in relations between the different social segments or in the long-standing arrangements between the lords and the peasants, was sacrosanct. This argument permitted the heavy burden of labour imposed on the peasants to be seen as continuing

53 For example, the study by James William Bayley Money, published in 1861 under the title 'Java, or how to manage a colony', is full of praise. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Clive Day was much more critical. His study, 'The policy and administration of the Dutch in Java' (1904), dug more deeply and referred extensively to the available source material. Day took no pains to disguise his low opinion of Money's work.

a centuries-old practice. It also allowed the myth to arise that a uniform system was impossible because it was necessary to take account of local differences, which could be preserved rather than disappearing under the heavy yoke of uniformity. I found no confirmation for this way of thinking. In as far as the assumption of 'an interlocking set of local accommodations' is accurate, in my view this arose from the incomplete reach of the colonial policy-makers. Their inability to change what they encountered, rather than respect for local practices and institutions, is a more plausible explanation of the limited oversight and even more restricted control of the thinly staffed administrative apparatus over the situation at the foot of the colonized society. The notion of a progressive process of social levelling resulting in a de-differentiated peasant order, as suggested by Geertz (1956, 1963), illustrates the extent to which the colonial authorities overestimated the impact of their intervention. Despite attempts to hunt down reluctant peasants trying to evade their obligations to work, the authorities failed to mobilize each and everyone in the Priangan to plant coffee. Conversely, it is also necessary to reject the view that everything remained as it was. In an earlier publication, I referred to the famed village system on Java as an early nineteenth-century invention (Breman 1979) and my opinion has not changed since. What colonial history describes as a traditional institution could often be traced back to regulations and instructions imposed from higher up. The actions of the Priangan chiefs, for example, should not be seen as those of an established elite, respecting existing forms of sovereignty. In examining the significance and role of the native aristocracy, I have placed them in the context of the colonial policies of sedentarization, territorialization and hierarchization that led to far-reaching changes in relations between lords and peasants.

While the introduction of the cultivation system was clearly demarcated, its abolition was laborious and not at all transparent. Like most authors, I have taken 1870 as the watershed year, as that was the year in which the Priangan system of governance was abolished. Despite this, however, the compulsion to grow coffee remained for some time, even though it was now presented as a form of cultivation that gave priority to the interests of the peasant-producers. Various reasons have been given for the somewhat puzzling demise of the *cultuurstelsel*, most of which Fasseur rejects as unconvincing (1980: 125-9). He himself tends to explain the phasing out of the regime in terms of external circumstances, namely pressure from an increasingly vocal lobby of liberal businessmen and politicians in the metropolis pushing the government to withdraw from the strictly regulated colonial economy. Cees Fasseur disagrees with Wim Wertheim, whose

seminal work on the changing fabric of Indonesian society and economy, published shortly after decolonization (1956), attributes the disappearance of the cultivation system to three causes: the transition from government intervention to the free interplay of market forces, shrinking profits from government-controlled cultivation, and the impact of Multatuli's book *Max Havelaar*, which had aroused the public conscience. Fasseur rightly points out that Dutch capital initially showed little interest in investing in the colony. As time passed, however, this interest became increasingly strong. Private and large-scale agribusiness had already started to gain momentum before the end of the nineteenth century, and this was to grow into an extensive agro-industrial complex in the early decades of the new century. Thanks to the new Agrarian Law of 1870, which denied the native population access to its own land-base, and helped by a government that leased this 'waste' land, now declared state domain, to Western companies for the long term and on very favourable terms, agribusinesses emerged that covered much larger areas than the coffee gardens ever had.

Fasseur is more correct in rejecting the notion that the cultivation system declined because it generated steadily falling profits. On the basis of conservative estimates he calculates that, on the contrary, while remittances from the colony accounted for less than a fifth share of national income in the first 20 years, by the 1850s they had risen to nearly a third. Colonial goods brought in increasingly high profits, to such an extent that this was one reason why it took so long to phase out the system. As elderly statesman Baud had astutely observed, Java was and remained the cork on which the Dutch economy stayed afloat. The desire to drive up colonial profits to the maximum was matched by a compulsion to save as much as possible on the costs of colonial exploitation. No increases in expenditure could be proposed or approved which, according to Baud, 'were not, in the strongest sense, strictly necessary' (Van Deventer III, 1866: 22). Lastly, the publication of Multatuli's critique of the colonial enterprise undoubtedly had a considerable impact. Nevertheless, Fasseur concludes with good reason that his staunch critique of both liberals and conservatives did not meet with a warm reception from the political establishment. The tone of this dissenter was considered too sharp, and there was widespread unease about why it would be necessary to forfeit such an easy and important source of income. This was essentially the same argument Baud had used to reject an increase in the meagre wages with which the coffee planters in the Priangan were palmed off: why pay more for something you could get for so very little? The guilty conscience could be kept in check as long as the profits were considered to make a welcome and indispensable contribution to the

growth of the Dutch economy. Now and in the distant future, a justification that also applied to the continuation of colonial domination itself.

If this interpretation does indeed do justice to the policy pursued both in the metropolis and the East Indies, how should the demise of the cultivation system then be understood? As I have outlined in this study, the causes of the decline and fall lay in the regime of unfree labour itself. Denying that the peasant population on Java had acquiesced in the forced cultivation and delivery of crops for trade runs through my argument like a red thread. I am therefore fundamentally in disagreement with authors who recognize that the burden on peasant labour was unprecedentedly heavy while simultaneously expressing their surprise that the large majority accepted their fate with docility. Not only Fasseur, but also Van Niel and Elson (and, for example, also Blussé 1984: 80), interpret the situation in this way.

> Disturbances of the peace that might have shaken the government awake did not occur in this period, with the exception of Banten, which was a traditional hotbed of unrest. Baud expressed his surprise in 1847 at the 'resignation' of the people, who lived under the yoke of a system that rode roughshod over their rights and institutions. Official reports referred to only very few instances of active resistance to the cultivation system after 1840 (there were undoubtedly more cases of passive resistance, but these were less easy to identify, unless they took the form of mass desertion). (Fasseur 1975: 47)

> One of the more remarkable phenomenon [sic] of the mid-nineteenth century was the acceptance of the Cultivation System by the Javanese; if they did not accept it willingly or gladly they certainly did not protest as much or as vehemently as in the later period. Generally speaking the period of the 1830s to the 1850s saw little protest of a violent sort associated with the System. (Van Niel 1992: 115)

Land flight, sabotage, strikes, public demonstration and other forms of resistance and protest are all incidentally acknowledged in Elson's study but they do not add up to much and are also absent from the detailed index. 'By far the most common response among peasants, however, was simply to make the best of their circumstances' (Elson 1994: 96).

The Indonesian historian Sartono has contradicted the suggestion that disruptions of law and order were peculiar to Banten. He begins his case study of that region – a revolt which broke out in 1888 – by pointing out that agrarian unrest was endemic and erupted in risings of the peasantry

against colonial authority time and again in almost all the residencies of Java (Sartono 1966: 1-2). The statements of the colonial historians quoted above lead me to characterize their assessments as indicative of a statist bias.[54] In the first place because the authors referred to above understate the structural violence used to pressgang the peasants to cultivate the compulsory crops and to ensure they continued to do so. Secondly, because they fail to acknowledge the resistance that did occur; in the Priangan immediately after the introduction of the system and in the period that followed, not occasionally but persistently and on a large scale, from high to low. Creating the impression that the peasants docilely allowed themselves to be set to work for a price that made a mockery of the real value of their labour, does no justice to the rich arsenal of evasion techniques, sometimes extending to sabotage, obstruction or desertion; and if that had no effect, a refusal to work could lead to a confrontation with gang bosses, chiefs or colonial officials. On accepting a chair as professor in the history of Asia, Schulte Nordholt observed that the colonial expansion of the Netherlands created a state of violence that has only been addressed marginally in accounts of the historiography of the metropolis. His conclusion could hardly be more explicit.

> It is a misconception to claim that this was only something temporary, a closed-off phase in the development towards a presumed state of 'peace and order'. Anyone alleging this does not sufficiently recognize that the violence experienced throughout almost the entire archipelago established a regime of fear, and that this violence continued to resonate in the memories of the people until the end of the colonial era. (Schulte Nordholt 2000: 8)

As was to be expected, Fasseur thoroughly disapproved of this judgment. In a response a short time later, he accused his colleague of ideological

54 In an otherwise positive appraisal of the Dutch edition of my book – 'Breman's account is measured, assured and compelling, a splendid piece of sustained analysis' – Elson takes issue with my criticism of his statist bias (Elson 2011). However, I am not the only one to express this reservation of his otherwise excellent study on the impact of the cultivation system on Java's peasantry. Knight, another prominent historian of colonial Indonesia who has mainly researched and published on sugarcane production in coastal Java for export, has questioned Elson's use of state archives with a minimum of critical discussion. 'Village Java under the Cultivation System makes so relatively little attempt to critically distance itself from the figurative colonial archive. The vast body of opinion and "data" assembled by colonial officials in the mid-nineteenth century is treated as substantially value free.' (Knight 1996: 122) For another critical appraisal of Elson's argumentation on similar grounds as mine, see Clarence-Smith 1994: 258-9.

prejudice, because he did not and could not substantiate his argumentation empirically (Fasseur 2000: 10). Yet this lack of empirical proof was precisely the essence of Schulte Nordholt's criticisms of the source material as recorded in the colonial administration.

Fasseur's robust allegations are completely compatible with his tendency to deny all colonial injustices that cannot be supported by factual evidence. But can this position itself not also be seen as ideologically biased? This is what Levyssohn Norman argued as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, with his statement about the wide discrepancy between the sometimes malevolent nature of policy practice and the overly favourable way in which it was presented. He illustrated this discrepancy by referring to the good intentions that the British interim administration in the early nineteenth century claimed for itself and the adverse reality concealed in official documents.

> They all breathe the same spirit of paternal concern for those subject to the system and of great philanthropic liberality; yet if one lifts the tip of the paper veil, one is surprised at the way in which these mild principles are – or rather, are not – put into practice. (Levyssohn Norman 1857: 182)

Such misrepresentation of reality did not of course change after Dutch rule in the colony was restored. That is clear, for example, from the series of residency reports drawn up in 1840-41 on the punishment of village chiefs for failing to perform their duties. Baud, now national adviser on colonial affairs, had asked the Governor-General in mid-1840 to inform him about the custom of disciplining these local headmen by caning them. He let it be known that this form of arbitrary punishment was forbidden and would henceforth be treated as a serious abuse of authority. An inquiry set up six months later by the attorney-general at the Supreme Court of the Dutch East Indies exposed a wide range of punishments the colonial authorities used to call village heads to order. They varied from reprimands to being detained or condemned to forced labour, sometimes together with dismissal. In five of the seventeen residences reported on – including the Priangan Regencies – caning was one of the common instruments of punishment. One Resident reported that in his area of jurisdiction between 1836 and 1840 around 1,000 village chiefs had been given punishments of widely varying severity and that, in 1840, under his authority, 15 to 20 punishments of caning had been meted out in coffee gardens and cane fields. In his commentary on this revelation, Van Deventer pointed out that this form of punishment should be seen as inherent to the cultivation system. He

alleged that, under this regime, village chiefs were put in the pillory and whipped until they bled, sometimes to death. A footnote shows that he was by no means exaggerating.

> We can cite examples where perpetrators have been given twenty lashes, which they did not survive. The evil of lashing in general is exacerbated by the different ways in which it can be applied, depending on the degree of cruelty of the official concerned. (Van Deventer I, 1865: 420)

Fasseur is not interested in paper veils. While others provide evidence that there was a state of violence, this colonial historian persists in his claims that such accusations are inspired by ideological prejudice.

The conclusion of my argument is that the cultivation system declined not as a result of external factors but, despite the frequent and excessive use of violence, because of it being undermined from the inside and from the bottom up. The army of conscripted labour in the Sunda highlands was no longer prepared to do what was mercilessly required of them, to deliver an ever-increasing volume of coffee beans. In my view, the throttle to make the engine turn over faster and faster eventually proved faulty. Attempts to repair it were counterproductive and it became more and more difficult to keep the coffee machine running. Those driving it were forced to change course. Firstly by dismissing the higher chiefs from their management of production and retaining the lower native officials, who were the actual foremen closer to the workfloor, under strict surveillance. And secondly by abandoning the cultivation of coffee in far-off plantations and relocating it to smaller plots closer to the peasant settlements – a lukewarm attempt that ended in failure.

I would like to add a few comments on the excessively heavy burden of labour that the colonial government imposed on the Priangan peasantry. In the first half of the nineteenth century, this burden was increased even more by the introduction of corvee services, on top of the mass mobilization of labour for the cultivation and delivery of coffee. This meant that, in addition to the tasks that the peasants had to perform for their lords, the government ordered them to fulfil a wide range of obligations which, in addition to cultivation services, took up at least one day a week and included guard duties, transport or construction work and tending to the needs of higher and lower colonial officials, including satisfying their desire for ostentatious shows of pomp and circumstance. All these services together accounted for substantially more than half of the peasants' working year. And how were these obligations met? Firstly, higher and lower chiefs tended

to disguise the true numbers of subordinates under their charge. The apparent low population density in the Priangan Regencies and its erratic slow increase was largely due to the obstinate under-registration of the number of households and how many people they comprised. This was one way in which the local aristocracy could put their own interests above the demands of the government. But the closer colonial inspectors and *controleurs* came to the workfloor, the more difficult it became to hide the true size of the actual manpower. The gradual growth of the population in the region (from 998,777 in 1871 to 2,187,236 in 1900) was more an indication of the increasing reach of the colonial authorities than the consequence of normal demographic accrescence. An important moment came when the authorities decided to shift the basic unit for mobilizing labour from the composite peasant household to the nuclear family of husband, wife and children. This reform aimed to involve the land-poor and landless underclasses directly in the cultivation of coffee by removing the dependency of the mass of the people on the larger landowners. The persisting problems with the coffee regime after this change show that the authorities had only partially succeeded in this aim. They never managed to mobilize the total peasant workforce. Besides those unfit to work (the elderly, the disabled and very small children) a privileged class was exempted from cultivating coffee for political reasons. This proved insufficient since large landowners continued to buy themselves free of their obligation to work by sending one of their farm servants or sharecroppers or paying for a replacement. It will be clear from my account that the cultivation system relied more on the land-poor and landless classes than on the peasant-owners. With this observation I come to the final conclusion, the impact of the system of forced labour on the position of the more disadvantaged segments in socioeconomic structure of the Priangan.

The developments that took place in the Priangan in the late-colonial era confirm neither Boeke's theory of dualism nor Geertz's theory of involution. The fact that neither of these analytical constructions provides a satisfactory explanation does not affect the fact that they can, in a certain sense, be seen as complete opposites. While Boeke believed that the stagnation of the native population in poverty was a consequence of internal factors, namely their lack of an economic mentality, Geertz sought the cause in the destructive impact of colonial domination. Both interpretations undeniably seem to offer something of an explanation for the developments in the Sunda highlands. An enclave of Western economic activity emerged in the Priangan as early as the end of the nineteenth century which the native population either had nothing to do with, as it was denied access to this

capitalist circuit, or remained firmly at its base as unskilled, unregulated and poorly paid coolie labour. This does not, however, allow the conclusion to be drawn that the gap between the two sectors was in principle one of economic and social dualism based on cultural differences in norms and values.

At first sight, Geertz's standpoint also seems to be correct, as can be seen from the following statement by a senior regional official in 1892.

> One of the few things that can be said to be generally true throughout the Priangan is that the people, everywhere to a greater or lesser extent have time in abundance, but nowhere have money in abundance.[55]

The image of persistent poverty in which the whole population was immersed as the consequence of a progressive process of social levelling is, however, incorrect. Although the relatively privileged upper social layer in the Priangan had also failed to survive the regime of forced coffee cultivation unharmed and had no opportunity to develop under their own steam, this peasant elite – thanks to its close ties with the aristocracy – could usually avoid having to perform the despised heavy cultivation and corvee services themselves. Having appropriated the largest share of the cultivated land, the households of these well-to-do owners even succeeded in strengthening their prominent position after the abolition of forced labour. By giving their prosperous lifestyle a pious disposition they increased their power and acquired a degree of dignity that made them opponents rather than allies of the colonial government.

How did the much more substantial rural underclasses fare after they were freed from servitude? The colonial policy-makers eventually succeeded in accessing the labour sealed up in composite peasant households and mobilizing it directly to perform the cultivation and corvee services required by the government. The pattern of employment changed, as the conscripted labourer made way for the footloose coolie, as those who had earlier been the victims of forced labour were now able to offer their labour freely. Freedom of movement increased but, before commenting on this, I would like to note that the land-poor and landless classes had been accustomed to moving from place to place since time immemorial. These shifting peasants were therefore suited to the demands of mobility, roaming around in search of work and shelter, for example by clearing forest

55 J. Heijting, Resident of the Priangan Residencies, in the Colonial Report for 1892, Annex C: 17.

lands or sharecropping for a large landowner in an attempt to move up a rung on the agrarian ladder or, conversely, escaping forms of dependency that they experienced as too restrictive. These were the 'vagrants' that Van Sevenhoven considered it necessary to warn against, unreliable folk if only because of their footloose lifestyle, who were barely visible in the nebulous landscape and against whom villages had to protect themselves by denying them access. I described the presence of this proto-proletariat in the early nineteenth century in an earlier publication, rejecting the suggestion that it was not embedded in the rural order based on agriculture and the village (Breman 1987a: 47). Towards the end of the nineteenth century this underclass had freed itself of its ties of attachment. This was accompanied by an increase in size, a consequence of the growing land pressure. The inability of more and more people to meet their basic needs was caused not so much by a sharp rise in the population, although it was growing more rapidly now, as by the decision to deny the native population access to as yet 'uncultivated' land. The mobility of the proletariat was also encouraged by the abolition of the pass system, that had restricted the free movement of labour under the *cultuurstelsel*. Small landowners experienced a process of semi-proletarianization, because the plots they owned produced insufficient food for even a minimal level of subsistence and they had to do paid work to supplement it. The problem was that there was insufficient regular employment available that might offer this enormous pool of labour that was now available full- or part-time the prospect of a life without poverty and the opportunity to improve their living standards. Did the large-scale public works now set in motion to open up the region – the construction of roads and railways, better transport, the growth of trade and industry – not provide a large quantity of jobs and higher incomes? The people of the Priangan were indeed freed from their sole reliance on agricultural production in which they had been engaged from generation to generation, but only to remain firmly confined at the bottom of the new economic order. The benefits of this process of opening up and the new infrastructure that accompanied it were primarily enjoyed by those who had initiated it, and hardly – if at all – by the large mass who were now free to move around at will. The majority of the Sundanese people occupied the lowest echelons in the hierarchy of the widening and more diversified labour market but qualified for nothing more than low-skilled employment on a casual basis, with a meagre and irregular wage and very little chance of improving their lives. Despite the impressive expansion of economic activity in the region, the purchasing power of this proletariat hardly increased, while the existing inequality, both within native society

and between that society and its expatriate managers, remained intact. The sharp inequality was recorded in a series of detailed reports labelled as 'Diminishing Welfare Investigations' in the early twentieth century. The course taken after the mass of the people in the Sunda highlands had been released from servitude was one of dependent development, in the form of their continuing subordination to interests other than their own. It was a course referred to in late-colonial terminology as progress.

Glossary

The spelling of words and terms is according to current usage and is at variance with the colonial nomenclature.

adat	customary law
adhipati	title for high-ranking official
agus	title for lower gentry
alang	long grass
alun	open square in front of court or public buildings
amil	village priest
anklung (*Sund.*)	musical instrument made of bamboo
aria	title for high nobleman
asep	title for lower gentry
aturan baru	the new order (after abolition of indirect rule in Priangan)
babad	Javanese chronicle
babakan	hamlet
bahu	land measure, approx. 0.7 ha
bahu aris	petty chief
bakti	ceremonial gift of client to his lord
balebandong	centre of native administration
balubur	court lands around resident of regent
batur	workmen, labourers
bedog	sickle
bilal	preacher
bonken (*Dutch*)	low-value metal coins
bujang	farm servant
bumi	landowning peasant, head of household
buniaga	new settler coming from elsewhere
bupati	regent
cacah	corporate peasant household, unit of taxation
cacah baku	landowning peasant
cacah kopi	household charged with corvee duty to grow coffee
camat	substitute, deputy of district head
camat gunung	official in charge of keeping area clean and tidy
cambutan	coffee sapling
carik	apanage, land parceled out to sharecroppers
controleur	colonial civil servant of junior rank at district level
cuke	one-tenth share of rice harvest collected as taxation

cutak	district, area of tax collection
dadap	shadow tree
dajeuh (*Sund.*)	court, residence of regent
dalem	residence of noblemen
demang	high-ranking official
desa	village
dunungan	master
dokter jawa	native doctor, medical practitioner
gaga	land under shifting cultivation
gardu	watchhouse
garebeg	thrice-annual ceremony at the princely court
gemblang	lit. fat, a well-off peasant charged with full corvee duty
giring	roundup of people for corvee
gladag	porters under duty to transport, also draught horses requisitioned for corvee
glondong	petty chief
gula jawa	brown sugar
gusti	patron
haji	believer who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca
harim (*Arab.*)	village waste land
huma (*Sund.*)	land under shifting cultivation
hormat	respect, deference shown to superior
imam	priest
jago	lit. fighting cock, a tough and violent character
jaksa	legal or police official
jalma burung	lit. bird people, vagrants
jangol	checkpoint along highway, meeting place for corvee labour
jayangsekar	mounted police
jelma tihang hejo	footloose labour
jurugan	patron, lord
jurutulis	village scribe
kabupatan	regency
kakuwatan	notable persons
kalipah	religious official
kaluruhan	cluster of scattered localities
kamatua	village elders
kampong	locality
kaum	religious congregation
kapas	cotton
katarikan	village waste land

kebayan	village messenger
kepala	headman
kepala bandangan	overseer of waterworks
kepala jalan	leader of gang of corvee labour requisitioned for road maintenance
kepapa t'rup	gang boss of corvee labour for work in coffee garden
kepala cuke	collector of rice tax
keprabon	arable land set aside for officials
ketib	one who reads the sermon at Friday and Id prayers
kiyayi	respected man versed in Islamic knowledge
kikir	lit. scratching, scraping, roundup for corvee duty
kliwon	official of lower-middle rank
kommissaris kecil	high ranking VOC official in charge of coffee cultivation in the hinterland
kongsi	clique
kored	sickle
kota	main settlement, residence of regent
koyang	measure of weight, approx. 1750 kg.
kraton	court
kumetir kopi	official charged with mobilising corvee labour for coffee cultivation
kuwu aris	petty chief
lebe	village priest
lembur	main village
lengser	low-ranking official
lurah	village head
lungguh	apanage, prebendial domain set aside for officials
madath	opium
mandador	manager
mandur	foreman, gang boss
mantra	petty chief
menak	nobility
mengawula	patron-client relationship
merbot	religious official in charge of maintenance of the mosque
merdika	freely cultivated coffee
modin	mosque official who gives the public call to prayer
nabob	vulgarly rich man during rule of East India Company in Indian subcontinent
negorij (*Dutch*)	settlement
ngabehi	high-ranking official
ngalie dung	client of lord
ngawula	patronage, clientelism

njeupah (*Sund.*)	festive meal served at house of patron
numpang	landless dependent peasant, sharecropper
orang miskin	poor people
orang pawong	well-off people
paal (*Dutch*)	pole, measure of length approx. 1500 m.
pacul	hoe
padi	unhusked rice
padi zakat	one-tenth share of rice set aside for the clergy
pager	hedge
palang	petty chief
pancalang	constable
pangerang	title given to higher nobility
panghulu	chief religious official
pangkat	high-ranking official
panglaku	bearer of orders
panglawe	petty chief
pangreh pradjah	corps of native officials
panukang	client tilling fields of lord
parang	machete
pasangrahan	resthouse for touring officials
pasar	market
pasowanan	ceremonial audience at court of ruler
patih	vizir, chief manager on behalf of regent, chief administrator of regency
paying	parasol, color indicating rank
pedati	cart for transport of commodities
penatus	petty chief
pesantren	boarding school for religious teaching
petingih	official
pikul	measure of weight, approx. 62,5 kg
pinter	smart
prajurit	armed police
pratag	shed for drying and storing coffee beans
prentah	order, instruction
priyayi	nobility, aristocracy
raden	title for nobleman
rahayat	well-to-do landowner and client of overlord
real	Spanish Real known as 'piece of eight'; Sp.R. 1 = 1.125 Rds (Dutch)
rukun	amount of possessions as measure for corvee duty
rijksdaalder (*Dutch*)	high-value currency; Rksd. 1 = 2,50 Dutch guilders

ryotwari	system of land taxation introduced by E.I.C. in British India
said	religious title, preacher
sarung	native dress to cover lower part of body
sawah	irrigated ricefield
sawah kaprabon	sawah set aside as apanage for village officials
sedekah	religious feast
selir	concubine
sentana	relatives of *priyayi*
sikapan	ornamental dress for native officials of high rank
sikep	landowning peasant, head of household
sirih	betel nut
somahan	nuclear household
susuhunan	ruler of Mataram, later of Surakarta
tandu	palanquin
t'rup	work gang for corvee duty in coffee garden
tanah priangan	Priangan lands
tegal	dry land under regular if not permanent cultivation
tipar (*Sund.*)	land under slash-and-burn cultivation
tugur	corvee duty
tumenggung	title of high-ranking official
tuan mandor	VOC official appointed to oversee coffee cultivation and stationed in the hinterland
tua tua	village elders
ujang	lower gentry
ulu ulu	village official in charge of waterworks
umbul	district head
wayang	puppet play
wedana	official in charge of district
zakat	religious tax, share of income collected for redistribution by clergy

List of abbreviations

AN	Arsip Nasional (Jakarta)
ASAA	Asian Studies Association of Australia
Bijl.Hand.St.Gen.	Bijlagen Handelingen Staten-Generaal
BKI en BTLV	Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde
BTLVNI	Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië
CASA	Comparative Asian Studies Amsterdam
CASP	Comparative Asian Studies Programme
EvNI	Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië
GG	Gouverneur-generaal
I.G.	Indische Gids
Inv.nr	Invoer nummer (NA)
KITLV	Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde
KT	Koloniaal Tijdschrift
KV	Koloniaal Verslag
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
MvK	Ministerie van Koloniën
NA	Nationaal Archief (The Hague)
NH	De Nederlandsche Hermes
NHM	Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij
OMW	Onderzoek naar de mindere welvaart der inlandsche bevolking op Java
RIMA	Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs
TBB	Tijdschrift voor het Binnenlandsch Bestuur
TITLV	Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde
TNI	Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië
TNLNI	Tijdschrift voor Nijverheid en Landbouw in Nederlandsch-Indië
VBG	Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie

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Source: Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia Collection, Jakarta

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UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

The cultivation of coffee on Java for the world market began in the early 18th century. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) bought the harvest from peasant producers in the Priangan highlands, but what started as a commercial transaction soon became a system of compulsory cultivation and delivery of coffee. The VOC remained at a distance, installing indigenous chiefs and binding the peasantry in servitude to them. What was called the Priangan regime merged in the 19th century in the Cultivation System of large-scale production of cash crops. *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market: Profits From an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java* establishes how labour and land were mobilized, why forced cultivation became the mode of surplus extraction and what impact this brutal system of taxation had on economy and society. The findings highlight why and how the peasantry, predominantly hailing from land-poor and landless underclasses, continued to resist for a century and a half the coercive coffee regime to which they were exposed.

Jan Breman is emeritus professor of comparative sociology at the University of Amsterdam. He continues his scholarly research, mainly focused on work and labour in Asia, as Fellow at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research and as a Honorary Fellow at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

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